

# MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1928

Vol. XCII

NUMBER 4

---

---

## Speakeasy Street

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF A WHOLESOME  
LOVE THAT SURVIVED THE RECKLESS BROADWAY  
NIGHT LIFE WHICH LURES LESSER SOULS  
INTO THE SINISTER UNDERWORLD

By Inez Klumph and George Gerhard

**D**OWN Peacock Alley and into the ladies' room the two girls strolled, eyes alert for any possible acquaintance. The maid in the waiting room did not welcome them; she knew their kind.

"They'll wash their hands and dry 'em just by waving 'em in the air," she muttered disgustedly. "Never tip me a cent. Cheap stuff!"

Blandly the two girls ignored her, as they carried out her prophecy to the letter. Vi, the taller, less attractive one, merely renewed her make-up, but Betty Jordan delved into a huge hand bag, brought forth cold cream, powder, mascara, and two kinds of rouge, and "did her face" all over.

"It's great to have a decent mirror," she announced appreciatively. "All I've got at home is a cracked one that makes me look like I had jaundice and dropsy. Say, Vi, which kind of rouge looks good on me, orange or raspberry?"

Vi, lolling back on the *chaise longue*, narrowed her eyes critically.

"Well, now that you've got your hair light again, I'd use raspberry," she advised. "Say, you don't care how much trouble you make yourself when you're meeting Dick, do you?"

"He's worth it."

"Oh, say! What is he, anyway? A cheap hooper out of a job, playing bits in movies when they'll have him. Doesn't care whose money he takes so long as it's good."

"You stop that!" Betty whirled on her angrily. "He doesn't steal—Jerry Malloy was jealous of him, that's why he said that! And he dances as good as Maurice, and when you get the right angle on him he photographs so much like—"

Vi groaned loudly.

"Sure. I know all that. Acts like John Barrymore, too. And sings like Caruso did. They say he's an artist at blackmail,

too. Why don't you pick somebody big, instead of a no-good guy like him? First thing you know the newspapers 'll be calling you the little woman waiting patiently outside the walls of Sing Sing while he does time."

"That's not true! I won't, either. You've got Dick all wrong."

"Changing his name! Why, I knew him when he was Dick Kinney, running with the gas house gang. And now he's Val Ricardo, and not even Italian enough to like spaghetti. He makes me sick. And you're so batty over him you're buying face powder that's four dollars a box when your shoes are falling to pieces, and you're late to rehearsal every time you show up at all. Get wise to yourself, Betty. He'll play for money if he ever takes a girl, and all you'll get will be a nice buggy ride."

Betty refused to answer, but finished making her rather pretty little face into a vividly painted mask. She cocked a cheap, smart black hat over her yellow hair, saying "Gawd!" when the loosely sewn brim parted from the crown on one side.

"Make it yourself?" asked Vi, languidly rising.

"Yeh. Like one I saw on Gloria Swanson in the rotogravure Sunday." Deftly she repaired the damage with two pins taken from the hem of her skirt. "Well, I'll chase along now. See you at the hall."

"You better—and get there on time, too. Tony Lewis said you'd lose your job if you showed up late again."

Betty's chasing took her away from Broadway toward the west, along one of the dingy streets where forlorn brownstone houses huddled so close that they seemed to lean on each other. The upper windows, sleazily curtained, sometimes displayed battered "Rooms to Rent" signs, the first and basement floors were shut tight, as a rule, with suspicious discretion.

Betty scurried along for two blocks, then turned quickly into the area way of one of them and rang the bell of the basement door, which was hidden behind heavy grille work. The whole house had an especially dilapidated look; apparently it had stood empty for years. But after she had rung a second time a man peered out suspiciously, then grunted "Lo!" and let her in.

She went down a dark hall, through a kitchen, and turned into a long room at the left. Two men sat at a table in a far corner. Small glasses and a bottle of

whisky were before them. At a table nearer the door sat another man, papers and an account book at his elbow, figuring on the back of an envelope.

"Hello, Dave," Betty said, and nodded to him. "Got a drink for me? I've been rehearsing all morning and I'm dead."

"What 'll you have? Got some good rye."

"Scotch, please—high ball with ginger ale," she decided.

He shouted: "Louis! Scotch high ball, ginger ale," and she turned toward another table. Then, apparently seeing the other two men for the first time, she stopped short.

"Val!" She hurried over to the corner, both hands out. "This is great. Tony Lewis asked me about you just this morning; says he thinks he can get you in the show."

"Well, he needn't try," the younger of the two men told her ungraciously. "I've got something better to think about than any job he could give me."

"Sure; he's so damned good he's starving to death," the other man cut in, rising heavily. For all his bulk he had a curious ease of movement, once he was on his feet. Sam Carrigan had been well on his way toward the heavyweight championship when booze overtook him.

A man in a dirty white coat brought Betty a bottle of ginger ale and a glass with ice in it, and set a bottle of Scotch whisky beside them. She mixed her drink, took a pencil from the tousled depths of her bag and made a mark on the tablecloth.

"Listen, Val," she said, the moment the waiter was out of earshot, "I got Tony to say he'd take you. I thought you'd want it. Why, they think so much of the show they're going to open it cold on Broadway; won't even try Washington or Philly first. Val, I wanted to do it for you."

"How often have I got to tell you I won't monkey with stuff like that?" Ricardo demanded. "It's big money I want. I'd have a swell chance in that show, wouldn't I, with Tim Powell in the cast? He'd be so jealous of me he'd have me parked behind the chorus men, if he let me on the stage at all."

"But, Val, that's better than nothing. Here you are broke, and drinking too much," the girl said, with a side glance at the pencil marks that kept score of his



drinks. "And I get so worried about you—last night I couldn't sleep."

Her voice choked suddenly with a sob, and she stopped. Val Ricardo was making no pretense of listening to her, anyhow. His eyes were on a man who had come in shortly after she did, and taken a seat in the opposite corner. The stranger was talking to the waiter with the expansiveness of a man who has avoided a hang over by getting well started on another drunk.

"And I win two grand on her altogether," he was announcing proudly. "She got away in the stretch, and say, it looked as if she was the only horse in the race and the rest was all running in the next one. How's that for a hot tip? Say, bring me another of these, and have one yourself on me, and—wait a minute, brother! Bet this like I told you and to-morrow you can buy this joint."

He dragged a roll of bills from his pocket and gave the waiter one, then sat back and regarded his empty glass benignly. Ricardo's face had taken on a queer, strained look; his eyes were greedy. He turned sharply to Betty.

"Listen," he said. "You say you want to be my girl; that you'd do anything for me? Well, get that guy's roll!"

"Oh, Val, I don't—why, I've never done anything like that. I've always been straight, Val."

"Aw, straight! Get that guy's roll and I'll split it with you, and marry you into the bargain. You've never made me see that you're in my class yet, or proved that you care anything for me. Well, here's your chance."

"But, Val, I wouldn't know how."

He swung his chair around so that he faced her squarely, and laid one hand over hers. The quick flush in her cheeks showed even through her rouge.

"He's boozy, and he'll be easy," Ricardo explained. "Go over and sit down with him; ask him what time it is—any old thing. Get talking, and make him talk. Pretend to drink with him. Then take his roll; it's in that inside pocket. Slide right out afterward. I'll be in the little front room."

"But, Val, that—why, I never stole in my life."

"This isn't stealing; he's a bookie, and he took it away from some sucker, himself."

Betty stared at him blankly, over-

whelmed as much by the realization that he was dishonest as by his expecting her to be.

"Listen, do you care anything about me, or don't you?" he asked. "Take this chance or leave it, and me, too. It's a chance for us to get married, that's what it is. If you don't care enough—"

Her sturdy little hands lay on the table, gripping each other tightly within his grasp. Her breath came quickly, unevenly. He looked straight into her eyes, sternly at first, then began to smile, and her hands relaxed and she leaned toward him.

"Val, you do love me, don't you?" she asked softly.

He laughed affectionately and patted her shoulder.

"Wait till you hand me that money and you won't ever have to ask me that again!" he said as he arose. "Don't lose any time."

He sauntered into the kitchen. Betty could hear him laughing there with Sam Carrigan and Dave. She took out a vanity case and powdered her nose and chin and made up her lips anew; then, rising reluctantly, she joined the stranger, who beamed on her and summoned the waiter for more drinks even before she sat down.

## II

THERE was little need for guile on Betty Jordan's part. The stranger began to talk at once, and she did not even have to pretend to listen.

When two more rounds of drinks had been brought—Betty each time substituting her full glass for his empty one—he began to tell her how much he liked her. He was leaning heavily on the table now, both arms stretched out before him, slumping over toward her.

Getting his money was all too simple. He was half unconscious when she slid her fingers into his pocket and drew out the bulging roll. Somehow, she felt more than ever ashamed, because it was so easy.

It was a big roll, and the bills were old and soft, a nice, comfortable handful that snuggled into her palm. She left the man with his eyes closed and his head sunk forward on his chest, and hurried into the small front room that opened from the main hall.

Dave was there, alone.

"Where's Val?" she demanded of him breathlessly. "He said he'd be in here."

"I think he's gone. Wait a second and I'll take a look around."

Nervously she walked up and down until he came back, not daring to follow him out into the kitchen for fear her victim might have awakened. Dave came at last, quickly, head down and chin thrust forward.

"Say, what d'you think you're getting away with?" he growled. "What kind of a joint d'you think this is, anyway?"

"Why, what do you mean?" Betty tried to speak calmly, but her voice trembled.

"Aw, say—" He grabbed her by the wrists and shook her viciously. "You swiped that guy's roll in there, and you might as well own up. He's going to squawk, and that 'll be sweet for me, won't it? Hand it over now and I'll try to fix him."

"But I—listen, Dave—" she wailed. "Val said to take it and bring it to him in here; he—"

"Hand it over." Dave shook her again. "You little rat, sneaking in here and cleaning my customers, and then pulling a story like that on one of my best friends. Hand it over and then beat it, and don't you ever show up here again or I'll have you run in."

So frightened that she could hardly control her movements, Betty took the money from her bag and gave it to him. Still abusing her, he straightened the bills out and greedily ruffled them through his thick fingers.

"You little bum!" he exclaimed, as he stuffed them into his pocket. "Come along now." He took her by the shoulder and pushed her ahead of him to the front door. "Remember, stay away from here!"

He gave her one final shove, so hard that she fell on the stone flooring of the area way, cutting her knee and tearing her stocking.

It was that torn stocking that finished her. It seemed as outrageous as the way Dave had treated her. She had paid a dollar and a half for those stockings, wanting to look nice when she saw Val, and they were the last pair she had.

She leaned up against the house for a moment, trying to get control of herself. The iron grille had clanged behind her, and she knew that Dave would not dare venture out into the open.

There was a window beside her, closed and heavily curtained, but through it she

could hear laughter from within, and men's voices. Val Ricardo was speaking.

"Say, Dave, why don't you take to the stage?" he was asking. "You were great!"

And Dave was answering, between shouts of laughter: "Wasn't I? Had her scared to death. Did you hear me bawl her out for dragging you into it? Here's your half of the roll."

So that was it! Val had tricked her, saying he loved her. No, he hadn't said he'd loved her; he'd said: "Wait till you hand me that money and you won't ever have to ask me that again!"

How he must have laughed to himself when he said that! Making her think he cared for her, and planning all the time he was making a thief of her to double cross her, and split the money with Dave!

Betty was sick with rage. She did not hear Sam Carrigan's: "Kind of a rotten deal for the poor kid!" All she knew was the fact that Val Ricardo had been stringing her; that he didn't care anything for her—and she adored him!

Why, she would have had new shoes and plenty of stockings, only she had given him all her money; he said he had a tip on the seventh at Saratoga. He was going to split that money with her, too, and the horse came in first, and then he said that she was mistaken, that she got the name of the horse wrong.

The facts straightened out before her, then jumbled themselves together, and slid into a background for the one hideous truth that Val didn't want her. He made her a thief after she had always been straight, and then he laughed at her with other men.

She went away at last, walking automatically, hardly knowing where she was. Even after she got to the dark, dingy rehearsal hall she was possessed by the thought of Val Ricardo's treachery. It had settled into the rhythm of her very heartbeats, as it changed the strongest emotion she had ever known from love to hate.

So Val felt that way about her, did he? Thought she was just a cheap little thing that he could make a fool of! All right, she'd show him! She'd see that he got his, and got it good, and then she'd tell him how he got it, and why!

"Makes me laugh now to think of it," she told herself as she changed into the old bathing suit that she rehearsed in. "Makes me laugh!"

Yet, despite everything, her love had not quite gone. And it was hard to laugh with the tears running down her cheeks.

The rehearsal was a short one. As they dressed when it was over, Vi, not at all deceived by the story Betty told her, offered to finance the purchase of a new pair of stockings.

"Gee, you're a good scout!" Betty told her, limping a little as they started down the street. "I wish I could do something for you."

"Oh, well, some day you can; some day when you and Val are headliners at the Palace!" Vi answered; then, catching the expression that swept over Betty's face, she added hastily: "How about that little shop near the Astor? They've got a special for a dollar to-day. What color you going to get?"

Betty braced herself, entered into a discussion of the artistic merits of *Burnt Peanut* and *Flush of Dawn*, and walked unsuspectingly on toward the situation that was to aid in placing a powerful weapon in her hands.

### III

WHEN he left the speakeasy Val Ricardo stepped over to Broadway with Sam Carigan.

"Pretty good pickings for you on that deal," Sam remarked. "That guy had a roll that would satisfy a taxi driver."

"Yeh—yes," Val corrected himself. He was trying hard to get up out of the class into which he had been born, and now that he had money in his pocket he felt much nearer to it than he had before.

"Well, what's eating you then? What more do you want?" Sam demanded.

Val hesitated a moment, then jerked his head toward an imported roadster that was parked at the curb, surrounded by admiring men.

"That, and things like it," he told Sam. "I want to be one of the big fellows on this street; yes, and in Paris, too. I want a swell apartment and all the things that go with it. I'll get 'em, too. I want the things Steve's got."

"You mean Steve Chamberlin? Say, that guy was riding his own pony on his dad's private polo field when you were dodging push carts. You'll never land where he is. Why, he's class."

"Well, I can be. Look at that guy who married the Vaudrey woman. She was

twenty years older than he was. She died off in two years, and look at him now—right in society, and can marry anybody he wants to. He's somebody. Look at Sam Mayo. Got started here as a dancer, went to London, and landed a girl with a title and money to burn. All I need is a start. There's no place like Broadway for a fellow to get ahead."

Sam glanced quizzically at Ricardo and said nothing. Val, waiting on the curb for the stream of traffic to flow past, began again after a moment.

"Look at the fellows who go into movies and make a killing inside of two or three years. Just a lucky break, that's all I need."

"Like the one you got this morning. Say, that was a dirty deal you gave Betty," Sam remarked bluntly.

"Won't hurt her any. She'll never be anything but a third-rate chorus girl. Maybe she'll let me alone now. She's been bothering me for six months."

"Sure, and you've busted your arms trying to push her off, I suppose!"

"Oh, well, she's been a damned nuisance, and she had this coming to her," Ricardo declared. "I'm all clear on that deal this morning."

His eyes were on a girl who was just stepping out of a taxicab. He turned quickly to Sam.

"Say, there's your sister," Val said eagerly. "Introduce me—come on, before she gets away."

"She'd wring my neck," Sam objected. "She's like you—doesn't want anything but the big stuff. You wouldn't count any more with her than Betty does with you."

"You don't have to tell her who I am. Come on. Say, who got you out of that gin mill the other night when the cops came in? Well, get a move on now."

He dragged Sam over to the girl, who was paying off her driver. She was not a pretty girl. Cecile Wallace had never been able to lay claim to actual beauty, and did not need it. She was piquante, vivid, and had possessed the gift of wearing clothes to the best possible advantage since the days when she had danced to a hurdy-gurdy's music in the crowded streets of Hell's Kitchen.

Cecile was as glad to see Sam as she had been when he was a successful fighter and she was a dancer in a cheap cabaret.

"Haven't seen you since you got back

from Europe," he told her, when he had introduced Val. "Like it over there? The papers had you chumming around with the Prince of Wales."

She laughed, delightfully.

"I didn't get that far, but I grabbed off a duke or two," she declared. "They liked me in Paris because nobody over there can dance. Offered me a new contract at the Casino when I finished, but I didn't dare to stay. Any good chorus girl over here could do my stuff, so I chased home to get something new."

"Going into another show?"

"Not me; I've got something better. Hostess at a new night club over in the East Fifties somewhere; real stuff."

"Who's your dancing partner?" Val asked eagerly.

"I don't know yet." As she talked she watched the passing crowd, her eyes sweeping over them quickly. "I was on for a few weeks in London with a chap who was good, but he may not be able to break his contract; wants too much, anyway; he's been at the Kit Kat."

Sam's mouth twisted again in its quizzical grin. Val, seeing it, smothered the eagerness that had conquered him for a moment, and became almost as suave and diffident as he wanted to be.

The three made their way across the sidewalk to the Astor's Broadway entrance, Cecile and Val talking in night club patter, Sam listening with a one-sided grin to Val's contributions, grimacing at his accent. He left them unobtrusively when they had strolled through the hotel as far as the lounge. Cecile said she was meeting a friend there for luncheon.

"May I wait with you till he comes?" Val asked.

She laughed appreciatively.

"How do you know it's a man?" she demanded.

"You wouldn't waste your time with a woman," he told her, looking down at her admiringly. "And any woman would hate you so that it wouldn't be safe for you to eat with her."

As it happened, Cecile's appointment was with a woman, one who was at that moment waiting for her not ten feet away. The appointment had been made because it was good business for both of them to be seen lunching at the Astor that noon.

But Cecile, who had spent all her money on Paris frocks and passage home on the

Mauretania—in hopes of meeting a millionaire—was now sizing up Val Ricardo as a possible prospect for luncheon. She inspected his clothes with a practiced eye, and approved of them. And of course you never could tell about men you met with Sam; in his heyday he had known everybody, and some of the big fellows still stuck with him.

"I'm late," she announced, glancing at her watch. "Guess I might as well go in and have luncheon alone."

Val clutched at the opportunity.

"Have it with me, won't you?" he begged. He had perfected the suave manner that he was using now after long practice.

They obtained a window table, each inwardly rejoicing that they could be seen both from within and without. Val, wise in the ways of Broadway, knew better than to give a woman her head in a restaurant, and take a chance on her ordering all the most expensive food in the place.

"I know exactly what you'll like, I'm sure," he told her, firmly taking the menu card from her hands. "Let me show you that I do."

She smiled, recognizing the trick, but she nodded approvingly when he had finished ordering. At least he was no cheap skate.

Val made good use of his time. When at last they arose from the table Cecile had suggested that he meet her at the Lorraine for tea and show her what sort of dancer he was, with a half promise that she might take him on when the new club opened.

And by that time, too, Betty Jordan, who had happened to glance up as she passed the hotel in search of bargain-sale stockings, had lost the last vestige of her love for Val Ricardo. Making her steal so that he could take Cecile Wallace to luncheon!

"She's just got back from knocking them into the aisles in Paris," volunteered Vi, who had not seen Ricardo. "Going to be hostess at a new night club here."

To Betty her voice seemed to come from a great distance, yet the words carried weight. Val must be trying to get a job at the club. Well, two could play at that game. She would show him yet!

#### IV

BETTY JORDAN had another rehearsal that evening. It was over shortly after



eleven, and she went home; that is, she went to the cupboard that sheltered her when she had nowhere else to go. It was an inside room in an old house not far from Broadway, dark and musty smelling, and so hot that she did not even light the gas.

Her bruised knee hurt with a throbbing pain that seemed to stab clear to her heart. She felt utterly wretched for the first time since she had come to New York to go on the stage, and met Val Ricardo four years ago.

He had been a chorus man then, and lived with his mother and an old aunt in a dank old house on Bleecker Street. Now he lived on the town, and kept a clean shirt and collar in the filing cabinet of a friend's office; the man was a casting director, and through him Val sometimes picked up stray jobs in the motion picture studios.

Betty was so unhappy that when she realized that some one in the next room was crying, she resented it. That other girl was crying the way Betty would have liked to cry, with a dismal, hopeless sobbing that broke off sometimes, chokingly, and then began again, as a child cries when it wants to stop and can't.

It made the cords of Betty's throat ache just to listen. Nobody else had a right to be unhappy; nobody could feel as bad as she did! She tumbled out of bed and caught up her flimsy kimono on the way to the hall.

"I'll shut her up!" she exclaimed angrily, as she rapped on the door next her own. "Keeping a person awake at midnight." She quite forgot that she herself usually came noisily in somewhere toward morning.

There was silence for a moment behind the closed door. Then it opened, and a frightened, wan little face peered out.

"Oh!" Its owner sighed in relief. "I thought you were the landlady." She swallowed hard on a sob; her voice was thick with them. "Can I do something for you?"

That disarmed Betty completely.

"Well, I heard you crying—"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know anybody could hear. I—I was—"

She broke down then, leaning against the door jamb, not even covering her face with her hands as she cried. Betty put an arm around her.

The sobbing girl was painfully thin, and

there was a limpness about her frail little body that made Betty recall certain days of hideous, gnawing hunger when she felt that she couldn't get enough to eat, no matter how much food was set before her. Betty pushed the girl into the room and closed the door behind them both.

"Better tell me about it," she urged, sitting down on the tumbled bed. "You'll feel better."

"It's not much to tell. Just—" The girl gulped hard, blew her nose, and then, hunching her feet up under her, faced Betty. "It's just what you keep hearing always, but I never thought it could happen to me. I came to New York because everybody said I could sing, and I thought I could get into a chorus in a show or something, and study, and maybe get into the opera some day. And my money's all gone and I haven't got anywhere, and there's nobody to help me, not a soul. I had a job in a five and ten, but they don't need me any more. And the landlady says I'll have to leave to-morrow, because I'm way behind in my rent, and I don't know where to go."

Tears were raining down her face again, and her shoulders were shaking. Betty gripped her firmly by the hand.

"Listen. Are you hungry?" she demanded.

The girl nodded.

"Well, you come into my room and we'll have some crackers and milk. I can get you out of this hole, if you're really any good. Can you dance?"

The girl nodded again, looking up hopefully.

"My mother was a dancing teacher back home before she—she died."

"I'll take you with me to-morrow and maybe you can get into the show I'm rehearsing with. You must be pretty when your face isn't all smeary." Betty glanced appraisingly at the girl's wide violet eyes and regular features. "You're the kind that makes up great. They need an awful lot of girls in this show, just kind of to fill in; not much pay, but it'll be something."

"Oh, that's too good!"

"What's your name?"

"Norma Barry."

"Honest or stage? Your real name? Sounds made to order. All right, Norma—come on along and eat."

There was relief for Betty in looking after this other girl, in realizing that diffi-



culties which seemed so insurmountable to Norma were really easy to solve. If only her own were in the same class! When at last Norma went happily back to her own room Betty was tired enough to go to sleep.

Norma was turned down for the show the next day, but the disappointment that revived her sense of panic vanished when a man, who had been standing with Tony Lewis during her unsuccessful interview with him, followed her to the door.

"Ever do any posing?" he asked.

She turned helplessly to Betty.

"What kind?" demanded that young woman.

"Commercial photography — fashion stuff," he answered, his manner as brusque as hers.

"She's done some, but not in New York; she's new here," Betty declared.

His sardonic grin told her as plainly as words could have that he knew she was obeying tradition and lying to him. He did not think it necessary to tell her that he wanted to engage Norma because of the fresh, unspoiled quality of the girl's beauty.

"What d'you pay?" Betty demanded.

"Can't she talk?" he asked, nodding toward Norma. She smiled at him then, and he said "My Lord!" under his breath. If he could get that kid he'd have all the young girl fashion stuff cinched! She would make his reputation.

"Regular rates; I'll raise it if she's any good," he told Betty.

"Well, they want to see her again at the Ziegfeld office, and of course if they take her on there—"

"Listen, I know this game as well as you do, and I heard her striking Lewis for a try-out here," the man remarked. "If she wants to work for me she can start this afternoon."

"I'll take it," Norma told him abruptly. "Where shall I come to work?"

He gave her a card, not his own, on which he scribbled his name and address, and told her to be there at two. She went out, almost dancing, to squander the quarter Betty had lent her for luncheon. She was going to begin making money; she wouldn't be dumped out alone on the bleak, unfriendly streets of the city!

And, because New York is in many ways a smaller place than any country town, five minutes later she passed the man who was to take a leading part in the little drama of her life. His name was Val Ricardo,

Shabby though she was, he noticed her, and tried to pick her up. She was too happy even to see him.

## V

BEFORE the new Twenty Club had been open two hours its success was assured. To be sure its location was perfect; it was in the East Fifties, not far from the cathedral, far removed from the rowdy night clubs that fringed Broadway. It had other claims to distinction, yet its failure had been quite as likely as its success. One never could tell about those things.

The walls were so decorated that, from the dance floor, one seemed to look through the flower-twined pillars of a long pergola to sunlit hills and the blue sea. It was daring in its scorn of the garish decorations usually favored by clubs whose cover charge was merely excessive instead of exorbitant.

The orchestra was an importation from the West. Cecile had saved money thereby; the music was remarkably good, and the men had cut their price for a chance to play in New York and so step later into big money.

Sim, the doorman, was the best of his kind; twenty years on Broadway had made him known, and he had an unequaled instinct for scenting money. No piker, no matter how well dressed, could get by him. Prohibition agents were his meat.

Cecile was worried, however, as she stood in a corner, studying the crowd.

"You can't tell a thing till a place really gets under way," she told Ricardo as they waited together during the intermission before their first dance. "The cheap crowd won't help here. And it isn't just money I want, it's class. I want people to know this club the way they do the Kit Kat in London, or the Embassy, or the *Jardin de Ma Sœur* in Paris. Then it'll last, instead of flivvering after one season."

"Well, you've got everybody here tonight who counts; all the best theatrical crowd, and—"

"Yes, but nine-tenths of it is paper," Cecile pointed out. "And the place is full of gate-crashers. I told Sim to let them in if they were well enough dressed, but I'm having the waiters refuse them drinks."

Nervously she adjusted the delicate crystal flower on her shoulder, and rerolled one stocking, quite as if he had not been there. Her costume had been subtly planned.

Scorning the easy triumph of flame color or rose, she wore sea-green and mauve and gray, a delicate, spring-blossom sort of frock, over a foundation of flesh-colored chiffon which, when she moved quickly, gave the effect of her having nothing on beneath the frail draperies.

Her gown was cut to her waist in the back, and was short; it did credit to a clever little American woman who, under a French name, was startling Paris with her creations. She and Cecile had known each other in their Hell's Kitchen days.

"There's Steve Chamberlin; know him?" Val asked suddenly. "Over there with that bunch of high-hats that just came in."

"I've heard of him," Cecile replied, and looked—and kept on looking.

Steven Chamberlin had that effect on women of her type. He was big, and beautifully built. He had been the best athlete of his time at Yale, and had never got over the fact.

He still lived for athletics, but his lovely Italian wife and two children were the guarantee of respectability which he had given the Four Hundred, since they expected something more of him than an occasional appearance at a wedding or a funeral.

Broadway claimed him when he was not shooting big game in the far-off wilds or playing squash or polo. He still had a sophomore's attitude toward chorus girls; he still thought the White Way was great.

Steve leaned back now and glanced about him, appraisingly. He was like a huge, healthy animal, so tanned that the three men with him took on the pallor of hothouse plants.

"Say, you'll have to have some girls here," Val told Cecile, as he watched Chamberlin. "Men like that will drop in, and some 'll want to dance; you'll have to have a few girls here, nice ones, or they'll either pick up with girls who come here with men who are just blinds, and go in for gold-digging; or they'll go somewhere else. Better keep all that in your own hands."

"Yes, that's an idea." Cecile nodded absently, her eyes still on Chamberlin. "Do you know him?"

"Sure." He added nothing to that, forcing her hand, making her ask for what she wanted. During his two weeks' association with Cecile he had learned that she

would trample on him if she could; he had to cling to everything that gave him the least scrap of superiority.

"Sure," she mimicked, and laughed up into his eyes, acknowledging the trick. "Bring him over to my table after our first number."

Turning, she nodded to the electrician, and the lights were dimmed to an amber glow. Her frock took on added charm, and her tawny hair suddenly came alive; she was a remarkable figure, vivid, arresting, as she swung lightly across the floor in Val Ricardo's arms to the music of muted violins.

More than once she caught Steven Chamberlin's eye, and more than once her fluttering skirts brushed his knee. He sat at a ring side table, half turned toward the dance floor, fingering a high ball glass. He liked Cecile's lithe, supple body; the passion for athletics which dominated him made him respect fitness in others. And he liked the trig smartness of her, the touch of gamin that had escaped her eager, determined efforts to acquire polish.

Rather ostentatiously Ricardo strolled out to the tiny entrance after Cecile and he had finished their dance and its encore. Chamberlin followed him. Val, elated by the storm of applause that had just subsided, was the man of the world.

Chamberlin, who wore that label without striving for it, was characteristically blunt. He had met Val in night clubs and speakeasies, when in pursuit of his second hobby; more than once Val had taken him to dives he had not known of before, or acted as the go-between when Chamberlin wanted to meet the lesser lights of Broadway. Steve recognized no change in Val's status, feeling, unconsciously, that no dancing man could ever approach him as an equal.

"Nice looking girl you're dancing with; who is she?" Chamberlin began.

"Miss Wallace has just returned from Paris, where she had amazing success at the Casino," Val answered, a shade too formally. "She danced for the King of Spain, and—"

"Oh, sure; cut all that. I want to meet her; bring her to my table."

"I'll have to ask her if she cares to meet you," Val retorted, nettled by Chamberlin's tone and manner. He wasn't going to let any Park Avenue snob ride him!

"Oh, lay off!" Steve remarked. "You've

been a Broadway ferret too long to get swanky now."

Val Ricardo stood silent for a moment, eyes narrowed, hands clenched. There were other men near, men who were listening, and smiling a little. He wanted to choke the life out of this big, sleek man who stood there bullying him, blackening his little moment of triumph.

His cigarette holder snapped suddenly between his fingers, and he jerked himself back into composure. After all, he could afford to wait. He made a little foreign bow of acquiescence—he'd been taught that once when he worked in a picture, and had often practiced it since, and planned to use it some day—and sauntered back into the main room.

Five minutes later Cecile Wallace and Steven Chamberlin were sitting at a secluded corner table, and the head waiter was opening the best champagne for them.

Val, dancing with a puffy matron whose husband was one of the club's backers, watched them whenever he could. Cecile had no lure for him, yet it annoyed him to have her so openly prefer some one else.

The mother and aunt who had brought Val up had adored him, and he had associated since his early days only with women who would give him that same admiration. He had grown tired of Betty Jordan, yet he missed the worship that he had had from her. Chamberlin's treatment rankled the more he thought of it.

"That sarcastic guy!" he muttered to himself, and added a few words that he had picked up in Bleeker Street before he wore long trousers. "I'll get him yet, and get him good!"

"What did you say?" asked the puffy matron, who was following his agile feet with difficulty.

"I was admiring your dancing," he told her. "You have an amazing sense of rhythm. If you'd only give yourself to it, take a few lessons, you'd dance like a professional."

"Oh, really? I love to dance. Tell me, Mr. Ricardo, do you ever give lessons?"

"No, it bores me," he answered, applauding enthusiastically as the music stopped. "But it would be a pleasure to teach you."

"Then—if you only would—"

They made a definite arrangement as to time, and also as to price. Val suggested twenty-five dollars an hour, appraising the

woman's jewels as he did so, and she assented without a murmur of protest.

The day after its opening the Twenty Club gave small hint of its success of the night before. Men were cleaning and waxing the floor, taking down and arranging the chairs and placing the tables on which they had been set, gathering up the debris, which ranged from lipsticks to torn menu cards and handkerchiefs.

There also was the crumpled twenty-dollar bill which had been tucked beneath a cushion of the padded seat built against the walls. Some girl apparently had discovered that money comes easy on Speakeasy Street, hidden the result of her knowledge, and then forgotten it.

Cecile Wallace, walking about nervously, turned sharply on Val Ricardo, who had dropped in to rejoice in the scene of his triumphs. He offered congratulations when she had finished her interrupted conference with the orchestra leader.

"How do you know it's a success?" she demanded. "We can't tell till a week from now at least whether the people who pay will come."

"I know it, but did you see the morning papers?" he said serenely. "All the second editions gave us space."

She shrugged her shoulders irritably. She had had but little sleep, and the meeting with Steve Chamberlin had been an annoyance, in a way, because she was afraid that she was going to fall in love with him.

So far she had carefully avoided that pitfall, and been glad, as she saw the various candidates for her hand develop into small-time hoofers or unsuccessful actors. There had been one, a booking agent for motion pictures, who had made money by handling foreign stars; sometimes she regretted having let him go.

But she had always aimed high. Now, after meeting Chamberlin, she was wholly glad. He was what she had always thought she would land some day—a man with real class, and money to boot.

But if she actually fell in love with him she might lose, because she wouldn't be able to scheme as she would have to in order to get what she wanted. His wife was an obstacle, although not a big one—not with divorces so easy to arrange. If she could only keep her head! You had to keep your heart, too, in order to do that.

Val strolled away, deciding that Cecile had a grouch, and would take it out on the first person who came handy; better let that be somebody else.

Cecile went to her dressing room and the refuge that women of her type always seek when they are troubled mentally—the bathtub. She emptied a box of soda into it before she stepped into the steaming water, and when she got out, poured a bottle of cologne over her firm white flesh before drying herself.

Then she curled up on the wide couch in her dressing room, determined to think things out calmly, but her whirling thoughts would settle about only one center—the realization that she cared for Steve Chamberlin, and that he appeared quite likely to fall heels over head in love with her.

She was still lying there when Betty Jordan knocked rather timorously on the door. Norma Barry, standing beside her, caught her breath as Cecile called sharply "Come in!" Norma would have fled, but Betty opened the door and walked in, heartened by Norma's fear.

"I want to ask for jobs for us," she announced, forgetting the speech she had intended to make as Cecile's shrewd gray eyes swept over her. The hostess, who had expected the caller to be some one connected with the club, frowned.

"You mean that you want to come here and trim the men who ask to dance with you?" she demanded. "Nothing doing. This isn't that kind of a place."

Betty pushed Norma forward.

"Does she look like a girl who'd be out to trim suckers?" she asked calmly.

Obviously Norma did not. Her wide eyes were as sweet and innocent as a baby's, and the loose waves of her brown hair lay softly around her delicately oval face.

"Can you dance?" Cecile asked her crisply.

"Yes, ma'am." The response had a quaint sound in that exotic room.

Cecile smiled a little. It had occurred to her that part of the duties of acting as hostess would be taken from her shoulders if she had some girl whom she could trust. Then she would have more time for Chamberlin.

This girl was too unsophisticated to ask for much money. Dress her right and she'd look like a débutante ought to but usually didn't.

"All right; I'll take you. Fifty a week," she told Norma. "As for you," to Betty. "You're too much Broadway. How'd you do your hair? Peroxide? Go to a good place and have white henna put on next time; it's better."

"I can look refined if I dress right," Betty told her anxiously. "If you'll give me a chance."

Cecile studied her impatiently. She had been like this girl herself once; hair too bright and a hard yellow, too much mascara on her lashes, the wrong pink smeared too vividly on her cheeks and lips. She had had an awful struggle to get out of it.

And now—now Steve Chamberlin was going to fall in love with her. The sudden glow that came with that remembrance swept her into unwonted generosity.

"All right; come early to-night, and I'll look you over," Cecile decided. "I don't suppose you've got any decent evening clothes, either of you? Well, go to this woman." She scribbled an address on one of the new club cards. "Tell her I sent you, and give her this. She'll charge whatever you buy, and you can pay her something each week. Be careful, though; she handles a lot of stuff that's soiled—salesmen's samples. Don't buy any of that; you'll have to have fresh things. And you—" to Betty. "Go somewhere and get your hair toned down. Be here by ten thirty."

## VI

"OH, Betty, that means we're engaged; we're going to work here!" Norma exclaimed as the two girls made their way out to the street after talking with Cecile. "Is it really true?"

"Sure it's true," Betty answered. Now that the interview had come off successfully, she would have denied that she had ever been uncertain of its outcome. "Didn't I tell you she'd take us on? Why, we're just what she wants. I'd have asked for more money, only, of course, she could see that you didn't have experience. Where'll we eat lunch? Shayne's?"

They had gone just once to Shayne's, the cafeteria just off Broadway that was frequented by vaudeville's lowliest. As a rule the girls ate in their rooms or at the Automat.

"Well, I— Don't you think it'd be nice if we went to some place that was sort of different? Like that one over there?"



Norma nodded toward a restaurant at the corner of Madison Avenue, whose gayly striped awning protected it from the sunlight and acted as an advertisement as well. "Perhaps it would cost a lot, but I got paid for posing this morning, and I'd love to take you there; you've been so kind to me."

"We'll go Dutch," Betty told her firmly. "We've got a celebration coming to us, landing that good job. All right, come along."

Norma would have slid unobtrusively into a corner, but Betty, who was anybody's equal when she was working, refused the table which the head waiter gave them and insisted on a better one. He would have said that it was engaged if Norma had not glanced up at him timorously just then.

This restaurant attracted a rather interesting class of people; it was not flashy enough to get the expensive modistes and their models and buyers whose shops were scattered all through the neighborhood; it did not cut in on the Park Avenue trade unless rumors of its excellent cuisine reached the tenants of duplex and triplex apartments within a stone's throw of it. Therefore its prices were not too staggeringly high.

Norma, after ordering from the fascinating cold buffet, leaned back with a sigh that seemed to come from the very soles of her shabby little shoes.

"I love places like this," she announced contentedly. "When I'm rich I'll eat here often."

"Well, if you stay on at the Twenty Club you can eat at the Ritz if you want to," Betty retorted. She spoke rather loudly, and noted with satisfaction that the young man at the next table apparently had heard.

Norma noted it, too, and frowned slightly, following Betty's glance at the young man. She met his eyes, and looked away hastily, but even that one glance had shown her that he was different from the men she had met in New York.

He was rather tall, and broad shouldered, and his face was so tanned that his blue eyes seemed lighter than they actually were. There was a vigor about him, even as he sat there finishing his luncheon, that made her feel sure he was an outdoors man.

Like thousands of other girls who are swallowed up by such cities as New York,

Norma smiled a little, ruefully, and wished that she might meet him, and knew that she probably never would see him again. And like thousands of young men, he looked at her, and wished that he might meet her, and felt fairly certain that unless something decidedly unusual happened he never would see her after that day.

But fate was kind, and the decidedly unusual did happen. Betty Jordan was its agent. Deciding at that instant to smoke, she lighted a cigarette. She shook the match vigorously to put it out; she had that morning invested in some new, very brilliant nail polish, and admiring its effect, hoped that others would do so.

Now, on Norma's little, tight hat, on the side toward Betty, was an ornament made of glycerined ostrich feathers, brittle and inflammable as tinder. The lighted match came in contact with it.

Betty, who was gazing about the restaurant, did not see it. Norma was equally unconscious of the crackling little flame. But Donald Morgan, in an instant, had leaped from his chair; it fell backward, but had not touched the floor before he had snatched the hat from Norma's head and put out the flame with his hands.

"Oh—I—" Norma, her hands to her head, stared up at him in amazement.

"It was your hat—caught fire—I put it out—" he stammered, the hot red of his embarrassment coloring his tan. "I'm awfully sorry, but I guess it's ruined," and he lifted the wreck from the floor and held it out to her.

"Well, I'll be—" Betty bit off the end of that sentence. Norma was still looking up at him, her face exquisitely flushed, murmuring her thanks. People all about were smiling, commenting on the incident to each other. Betty, with her thoughts on the luncheon check, had a sudden inspiration.

"Won't you join us?" she asked in her best manner.

"Oh, I'd like to!" Donald nodded to the waiter to transfer his coffee to their table, and took the chair that stood between the girls, moving it slightly nearer to Norma than to Betty.

In five minutes' time Betty had told him that she and Norma were hostesses at the Twenty Club, and urged him to be there that evening. She had sized him up as a man who might have money enough to pay just about one check there.



Afterward, having asked where he lived, and learned that he was a Westerner, she tentatively revised that estimate. You never could tell about Westerners. She would never forget one whom she had met when she first came to New York.

She had turned down his dinner invitation for one from a Broadway man who had said that he was a close friend of Ziegfeld's and could give her an introduction. This New Yorker had borrowed money for the dinner check from her and never paid it back, nor had she ever seen him again. Later she had learned that the Westerner was a millionaire.

Donald Morgan insisted on paying for the luncheon, although Norma tried, sincerely and determinedly, to prevent his so doing. Her ankle was black and blue for a week where Betty kicked her in an attempt to make her muffle her protests.

"Well, will we see you to-night at the club?" Betty asked him as he walked out to the door with them.

"You certainly will," he answered emphatically, glancing down at Norma.

What a little thing she was, and how different from this hard young creature! If only he could get to know her well, find out whether she had any people of her own or was facing New York by herself. She needed protection, he told himself; needed a man, the right man, to take care of her.

"Better phone and make a reservation," Betty was saying. "Just mention that you know me—Miss Betty Jordan—and they'll give you a good table." Then, as they reached the sidewalk: "My Lord, Norma, what 'll you do without a hat?"

"Oh, I didn't even think of that!" Norma exclaimed. Truth to tell, she had not thought of anything but Donald Morgan since meeting him.

"You must let me get you one," he urged. "It's my fault that yours was ruined."

Betty nodded approvingly. "Lots of good shops around here," she remarked, wondering if she could work things so that she would get a hat, too. "Right over there, for instance—"

"I can wear my old one home," Norma declared firmly. "I'll just take this spoiled feather off—like that, and turn it around."

She put it on, and laughed up at the young man, more bewitchingly attractive than ever.

"Gee, you're clever!" he exclaimed.

"But, honestly, I wish you'd let me get you one; I'd feel much better about it."

"But I'm going to be selfish; I'll feel much better about it this way," Norma told him, and he knew that her decision was final. What a peach she was; nothing of the gold-digger about her!

Betty gave him the address of the woman to whom Cecile had directed them, and he paid the taxi driver, and stood with his hat in his hand as they drove away. Norma, half frightened by the emotion that he had aroused in her, snuggled down in one corner of the seat without speaking, but Betty lighted a cigarette and proceeded to tell her in no uncertain terms just what she thought of a girl who had a chance to get a French hat for nothing and turned it down.

"But Betty, I couldn't let him do that," Norma protested. "It wouldn't be right."

"Say, listen, sweetheart, it's right to get anything you can in this man's town. If you're going to go around with your hands tied you'll starve to death. Why, I'll bet that guy's got tons of money. Said he came from Arizona, didn't he? Mining engineer. Well, he's fallen for you good and hard, and if you're the kid I think you are you'll let him spend a little of it on you. He'll have a good time doing it. Why cheat him?"

Norma paid no attention to her. His eyes were as blue as the sea, she told herself, recalling the way it looked where it swept into the inlet below her grandmother's house on the Maine coast. And what a nice mouth he had, and what a firm chin! And how big he was, and how strong looking!

You didn't feel with him as if you had to be on your guard all the time, the way you did with the men Betty introduced to her. They had met Val Ricardo as they were leaving Cecile's dressing room, and he had held Norma's hand in both his when Betty made them known to each other, and welcomed her to the Twenty Club most effusively. She had pulled away from him, not quite knowing why she felt abashed in his presence, and he had laughed and tried to kiss her.

"Let her alone!" Betty had said fiercely, and he had laughed again, and told her not to be jealous, and tried to kiss her, too.

Norma's thoughts went back to Donald Morgan. She wished that he had said

more about himself; perhaps he would, if he came to the club that evening and she had a chance to talk with him there. Donald Morgan! What a nice name it was.

Norma had never been so happy before as she was all the rest of that day. Cecile had telephoned the owner of the dress shop to which the girls had been sent, and given orders that the frocks they bought must be of colors which would not conflict with any of her own. Betty immediately found it impossible to get anything that suited her to which that restriction would apply, but Norma happily selected five, and spent nearly an hour deciding on one of those.

"That's fine," Betty told her, when at last she decided on a rose-colored frock with a skirt that looked as if it had been made of overlapping flower petals. "Now, when that neck's cut lower you'll be all set."

"Oh, but it's low enough already!" Norma exclaimed, whirling around from the long mirror.

"Say, who do you think you are, Queen Victoria? Cut it down at least three inches in front, and six in back," Betty told the salesgirl.

"I think the little lady's right," the salesgirl replied, shears in hand. "It'll spoil the line to lower it. That's a Cordet model, an import, and it's just right the way it is. Suits her type better, too. If you ask me—"

"I didn't!"

"I'd like to know what you think," Norma cut in, with a grateful little smile at the salesgirl. That embittered young woman disdainfully turned her back on Betty and went into consultation with Norma, with the result that the frock stayed as it had been in the beginning.

Norma arrived at the club that evening with her joyous mood somewhat dimmed by fear. What if she didn't make good? Betty had given her lengthy instructions, which made her feel more frightened than ever.

"Be nice to the men you meet; string 'em along, make 'em buy liquor," she told Norma. "This'll be an easy place to work, because they won't stand for any rough stuff here. But remember that you're an entertainer, and be on the job. Really, we're lots more important than Cecile and Val; folks don't care about looking at dancers any more, not very long, anyway, and we've got to keep 'em inter-

ested if they don't come with parties of their own."

"But I—I've never met many men," Norma replied. "I won't know how to be nice to them."

She got out of their taxi at the club door and stood with her coat huddled around her, a pathetic little figure, while Betty paid the driver.

"Oh, just make them talk about themselves," Betty urged, joining her. "Get a man started telling you about himself and all you got to say is 'Oh, how wonderful!' every two minutes." She took Norma by the arm and led the way across the sidewalk to the door. "Keep your head up and don't let the doorman razz you, now," she advised.

That lordly person sniffed perceptibly as he let them in, but Betty, taking her own advice, marched past him haughtily, and Norma trailed along behind her.

All Norma's fears were fulfilled during her first effort to earn her salary. Val had introduced her and Betty to two men who had proved their worth by immediately ordering a quart of Scotch. Betty finished her drink and went off to dance with one of them; Norma, sitting with the other, felt as if she had been stricken dumb.

"Where do you live?" she asked politely.

"Kansas City," he answered, and lapsed into silence.

"Do you—I mean, I've always heard it was a nice place," she volunteered. He gazed at her in gloomy silence and refilled his glass.

"Here, take mine; I don't drink," she urged, pushing it toward him.

"Don't drink?" he echoed, and pushed the glass back. "Tell me another."

Presently he asked her if she was on the stage. She said she wasn't. Desperate, she went on to explain that she had only recently come to New York herself, hoping to establish kinship with him in that way. When Betty returned they looked as if they had signed an armed truce and regretted it.

Betty's man asked Norma to dance, trampled all over her new silver slippers, held her so awkwardly that her frock was rumpled, and returned to the table so disgruntled that it took two high balls to restore his peace of mind. Norma was almost in tears. Betty, alarmed, signalled

to Val, who came to the rescue under the pretence of asking Norma to dance.

"Oh, I'm such a failure," Norma told him wretchedly. "I can't talk to strangers, and I couldn't dance with that man, and—oh, it's just awful!"

"Don't you care; he's just a boob," Val said consolingly. His arm lay about her so lightly that she was hardly conscious of it, and he guided her so easily that she was barely aware of the fact that he was doing so. "Tell me about it."

She poured out the tale of her difficulties, almost crying as she talked. "And I've just got to make good here," she concluded tremulously. "I don't know what I'll do if I fail."

"You poor kid!" he exclaimed sympathetically. "You're going to be all right; you just don't know the ropes, that's all. Soon's you do, you'll get along fine."

He was so much interested in her that he even forgot his foreign accent. The opportunity to do something for some one was new in his life, and he enjoyed the feeling of superiority that it gave him.

"In the first place, you'll have to drink a little," he went on. "Can't? Well, then, pretend to. Always ask for a high ball, and try to pour it yourself, and make it mostly water or ginger ale. And when they ask what you want done with your whisky, say you can't drink anything but ginger ale; the club gets a big rake-off for pushing it, by the way."

"Ask a guy where he's from, and then say, 'Oh, are you the Mr. So-and-so from there? Why, I've heard of you!' Maybe he'll fall for it. Make up some name, and then say that man told you about this one. String him along, make up a lot of guff this other fellow's supposed to have said. Say you heard this fellow could drink all his friends under the table—they always like that."

"And don't ever admit that you're a stranger in New York yourself. Say you were born here. If they ask you if you're on the stage, say yes, you used to be in the Follies; they always like that; they'll go home and brag that they went out with a Follies girl. Say you're just resting between jobs now, and getting ready for a big part in a musical show that's going to be tried out next month. They want a lot of stuff like that when they come here, see?"

"But what if they live in New York themselves?"

"They'll be the easiest ones to string. It's the fellows who think they're somebody because they live in a big city who have the least sense."

"But—oh, I can't lie like that," Norma told him, her eyes wide with dismay. "I—well—I just can't lie."

"Gee, what a cute baby you are! Well, then, when they ask you about who you are, and what you're doing, why, say 'Oh, that's my little secret,' or some line like that. You may get away with it, with those eyes of yours. Play the part of hard-to-get. And about the dancing, why, you're not so bad." Privately he admitted that she was pretty good, but it did not suit his purpose to admit that to her. "I can help you with that."

"Oh, would you?" Norma was overwhelmed. In her eyes, since she had seen him sauntering about the club, Val Ricardo was enveloped in glamour. He was a resplendent being, all that she had ever thought a man-about-town might be.

"I certainly would, and for nothing, too, though my usual rate's twenty-five an hour. Now, look here—" Val guided her to a corner of the dance floor. "Try this—left foot back and balance, see; no, left foot. That's the baby! And don't draw away from me so. Let go; relax! There we are."

"Say, in a week I'll have you doing the tango, you learn so easy. Then we'll do it when we're dancing together, and these guys 'll see you, and after that they won't dare even think you can't dance. The tango's got 'em all buffaloed."

"Now, try that step again. That's the way. Now shift quick to the other foot and do it again. See—quick—and easy. Make it smooth. Let your body go with the music. Now—"

He swung her lightly to the middle of the floor, indicating by the lightest pressure on her waist the moments when he wanted her to change. "Don't look so excited over what you're doing," he warned her. "Be more blasé, only keep that nice, sweet little look you've got. Say, you should see a bunch of the regulars when they're out dancing; girls like Nancy Sawyer and Vee Bolton—been headlining in musical shows for ten years, and you'd think they were at their first party, they look so sweet butter would melt in their mouths. That's it! You did it great that time!"

"Oh, thank you," Norma murmured gratefully. "You're awfully kind to me." She meant it from the bottom of her heart.

She did not even see Donald Morgan come in. But when the dance was over she noticed him, and went straight to the table where he sat alone, as if to an old friend. He was handsomer than ever in evening clothes, she told herself, and hoped that her rose-colored frock was as becoming as the salesgirl had told her it was.

She noted with relief that he wasn't drinking anything but mineral water. A scowling waiter noted it also, but grew suddenly amiable when Donald declared that he was hungry and demanded a menu. When asked what she wanted to drink, Norma dutifully asked for ginger ale, although she felt guilty about it.

"Nothing stronger?" he asked her, with the smile that went straight to her heart.

"Oh, no!" she answered emphatically. Then, as the waiter rushed away, she leaned toward him confidingly. "I can't get used to the way they seem to sell almost anything people want to drink here," she told him. "You wouldn't think there was any such thing as prohibition."

"Well, there isn't," he laughed. "Speak-easy Street is the longest street in the world; it stretches right across this country, and rich people, and poor ones, too, walk on it. It's certainly crowded in this town. I've seen more liquor since I got here than I saw in three years out in the West."

"Oh, please tell me about the West," she begged. "I've never gone farther than Buffalo. And about what you do there, and—oh, everything."

He laughed again, delightedly. Watching her while she danced with Val Ricardo, he had been tempted to set her down as less than what she had appeared that noon.

Now, however, there was no doubting the loveliness of her. He had sized up Val more or less correctly, and wanted to wring his neck for dancing with Norma, feeling that the man's very touch contaminated her, not giving him credit for his kindness to her.

Val was dancing with Cecile now, beneath tinted, lowered lights, to music temptingly seductive. She was sweeping the room with anxious eyes, looking for Steve Chamberlin, and he was watching Norma, and wondering how she was getting along since he had coached her, and

planning what he'd tell her when they danced together again.

But Norma had forgotten Val's very existence. For Donald Morgan, as forgetful as she of the food before them, was talking about the West, telling her of the cinabar mine in Arizona into which he had put every cent since he had graduated from mining school. Little incidents crept in; stories of the days when he had been broke and had taken to mucking in a mine in Idaho; stories of the time he had worked in West Virginia, and got mixed up in a family feud there.

"And now you've got a mine of your very own!" the girl exclaimed, fingering the bit of reddish-brown ore he had told her was his mascot.

"Well, not just mine; I've got a partner," he told her. "He's out there keeping an eye on it, while I sit around here waiting for a chance to see the lawyer who's going to help us when I go down to Washington and try to prove that it really belongs to us instead of to the men who came out there and tried to jump us. They represent a big company with loads of money, but we've got right on our side, and we'll hang on till they clean us out."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll win!" she said emphatically, with such assurance that her conviction reassured him.

"I am, too, with you to bring me luck," he told her. In his heart he knew that merely winning the lawsuit would not make him happy, unless he could win her as well.

Val, watching them, was saying to himself: "Lord, I've got to make that kid; she's the sweetest thing I ever saw. With her as a partner we could go to Paris and bust the town wide open! She seems to like that guy; I'll get rid of him if he hangs around."

## VII

DURING the week that followed, Donald Morgan and Val Ricardo fought each other for Norma's favor—fought with every weapon that either of them could summon to his aid. Val grew more suave, and nightly he increased the length of his lessons to Norma, coming early to the club, thus cutting short the time that she spent with his rival.

They created a small sensation by dancing together one evening. Cecile spoke to Ricardo so sharply about it that he hardly



dared look at Norma the rest of the evening.

"I'm the headliner here, see?" Cecile remarked curtly, pausing in her task of making up her eyes to swing round from the dressing table to face him squarely. "You're nothing but my partner, and that kid is just so much background. I won't have either of you trying to cut in on my stuff."

"Well, she's the one who—"

"I know better. She's a good kid, and she wouldn't dream of such a thing. You know the ropes. You're to blame. I won't stand for it. Try any of that again, and out you go."

He left her dressing room hating her more than ever. "Jealous of me, of course," he told himself. "She knows I'm too good for her." But he heeded her warning, and Norma and Donald had much of the evening to themselves, the only interruption coming when Cecile asked her to sit with Steve Chamberlin while she herself was dancing with Val.

The next afternoon Norma went motor-ing with Cecile and Steve, far up into the sunlit hills on the west shore of the Hudson. She could not quite understand Cecile's asking her to go, but was content to sit in the front seat with the chauffeur; she could not have heard what they were talking about even if she had wanted to, as the windshield on the back of her seat was in all ways efficient protection for them.

The second day afterward Cecile asked her to go again, and the day after that. Norma would have preferred her original plan of going to the Bronx Park with Donald, but Cecile's word was law.

"Using the kid for a blind," Val told Betty when he heard of it. "Well, Cecile's going to get hers some of these days, and it 'll come so hard that she won't know what hit her."

Norma and Donald had reached an understanding so delightful that both marveled at its perfection, and were almost afraid to have it take its natural course and deepen into acknowledgment of their love. Norma could not feel sure that Donald cared for her.

Val Ricardo frequently assured her that men like Morgan always wanted some one to play around with while they were in New York, and Betty advised her to take all she could get while the getting was good. Norma admitted that she did not

know men as well as they did, but in her heart she was sure of Donald.

And yet he had never said anything about wanting to marry her. Perhaps he didn't intend to. Of course they hadn't known each other very long—still, they knew each other very well. She could argue on either side with equal conviction.

Donald sent her flowers, and great baskets of fruit, and the books that he had heard her say she wanted to read. Her dingy little room took on a new aspect. She bought cretonne and made curtains and a bedspread, and painted the rickety old dresser, while Betty sat by and jeered at her for wasting her money.

"But I want to feel that I have a home," Norma told her. "Don't you think it looks pretty?"

"If you had any sense you'd get that two-gun man of yours to take an apartment somewhere for you," Betty retorted, flicking the ashes from her cigarette onto the floor that Norma had just scrubbed. Val Ricardo's devotion to Norma made Betty furious, although she no longer wanted him for herself. "Or you'd strike Cecile for pay when you go out with her and Steve Chamberlin. Wish she'd take me along; one of those little runs into the country would give me a bit of news for his wife that would put me on Easy Street, I'll bet. What happens on those trips, anyway?"

"We drive for awhile, and then have tea somewhere out of a big lunch basket that we take along," Norma replied. "And I pick pussy willows, or flowers, and yesterday Mr. Chamberlin had the chauffeur stop in a little town and buy some cards and we played hearts."

"My Gawd!" Betty ejaculated, but not piously. "Why not tiddlywinks? What she's after beats me!"

She failed utterly to understand that Cecile, keeping a steady hand on her emotions, was aiming at only one thing, marriage. She was giving Chamberlin the kind of recreation that he most liked; long hours in the country, nights filled with the glamour of Broadway.

She was getting up early mornings to learn to play tennis, so that some day she could play with him. She had learned all she could about his wife, and found out that Mrs. Chamberlin's most violent exercise was bridge. Well, it would be easy to win on that score, Cecile told herself.



She'd play tennis and golf with him, and ride with him, and they'd live in the country—in easy reach of New York, of course—and he'd have everything that he wanted, in return for which she would ask what he could easily give her; plenty of money, social position—she had no doubt of her ability to win that, once she was his wife—and a name worth columns of publicity if she wanted to continue as a dancer.

Life ran like a well oiled machine for all of them. Ricardo was coining money with his dancing lessons, and the money which he had banked was supplemented by the contents of a small box locked in the bottom of his trunk, a box in which lay two strings of rather good pearls and a bar pin of platinum and diamonds. Two of his pupils had "lost" them.

A society girl, who found herself nearing the end of her third season with no prospect of getting married, had almost openly suggested that they become man and wife. Val was holding that offer in abeyance, angry at himself for doing so, but unable to give up the thought of winning Norma Barry.

Then suddenly the wheels began to run gratefully, and to slip from their courses. Steve did not come to the club for two nights running, and did not phone. True, he sent flowers to Cecile on both occasions, and little notes begging her forgiveness, but Val neatly abstracted the notes before Cecile saw them.

Norma had no time for Val now, because of engagements with Donald. There were rumors that one of the club's best patrons was a prohibition agent. The head waiter demanded a bigger split on the profits. One of Val's pupils almost traced the loss of a bracelet to his nimble fingers.

Ricardo got up on the day following that disaster with a splitting headache and a determination to settle things with both Norma and Cecile. He telephoned Norma, but she was out, and Betty had maddening information as to her whereabouts.

"She was going to have breakfast at the Brevoort with that Morgan guy," she told him. "And go to the Metropolitan Museum later, and wind up finally at that little place somewhere near the Croton Dam for dinner, the one where you eat out on the balcony looking over a valley or something—yes, that's the name."

Then she went back to bed to finish her manicuring and read the Sunday newspa-

per supplements, well pleased with herself after catching the oath that Val muttered as he hung up the receiver.

He was angry at himself for caring what Norma did. He did not realize that he wanted her because he misread her sweetness, thinking that it meant submission, and that she would be the perfect door mat that he had always wanted a woman to be for him.

He and Sam Carrigan dropped in at the little inn where Norma and Donald were dining. Twilight was deepening the long shadows that the hills threw across the valley. To Norma it seemed that the moment was the most perfect that she had ever known; she felt sure that she would remember it all her life.

Val's eyes swept the room until they rested on Norma and Donald, seated in a corner alcove.

"There they are now," he said as if to himself. But there was undisguised menace in his voice.

Sam turned suddenly, divining from Val's tone that trouble was in the air.

"Who?" he inquired.

"Say, listen here," said Val, ignoring the question. "I've done a lot of good turns for you. I'm going to ask you to do one for me."

"What do you mean, a lot of good turns?" demanded Sam. "What did you ever do for me?"

"Oh," Val countered, "I suppose you've forgotten about that guy I trimmed for you last New Year's Eve. And that moll I shoosed away from you when you got tired of her. Say, don't you high-hat me!"

"Oh, them," said Sam weakly. His mind harked back to the gutters of Hell's Kitchen, where one didn't question motives, but acted instantly upon appeals from buddies in distress. "What do you want me to do?"

"Well, that's better," Val declared, filling up Sam's glass. "Now, here's the layout. You see that guy over there with the girl in the blue dress? Well, I'm laying for him. But I'm afraid he's too husky for me. Of course I could bump him from behind, but I want him to know where the bump comes from; do him good to meet up with somebody better'n he is. And I think he's too fast for me, anyway."

"Yeh?" Sam remarked.

"I want you to dust him off for me."

Sam was startled.

"Why me?" he questioned. "He don't mean anything to me. I don't even know the guy. I'm not even sure I can put him to sleep."

Val looked at him searchingly.

"Boy," he said, "you certainly have changed. You aren't the guy I used to know. Why, you're getting to be just a lounge lizard. Where's your Hell's Kitchen training?"

That got under Sam's skin. No one, not even Val, could question Carrigan's adherence to the code of the West Side streets, where one always took up a friend's battles no matter whether that friend was right or wrong.

Noting the change in Sam's expression, Val went on:

"That kid works at your sister's club," he explained, "and she's green. She's right from the sticks, and she doesn't know a thing. That fellow's trying to make her; met her at the club, and now he's got her up here. She's not that kind, and if I had the weight and the punch I'd make him lay off. But, as I say, while I'm pretty good at my weight, I'm afraid he's a little too husky for me."

"Say," asked Sam, "since when have you turned to saving girls?"

"This ain't funny, see?" Val blurted. "She's a nice kid, and I ain't going to have things all mussed up for her."

Val was purposely reverting to the sidewalks of New York; he was ignoring the polished grammar and accent that he had picked up from the débutantes. Also, he was banking on what he knew of Sam, who, like many of his kind, had a strong streak of sentiment, and could be counted on to rescue beauty in distress, whether beauty was aware of the distress or not.

"I ain't going to have some guy like this one step in and spoil the kid's life," Val pursued. "She seems like a sweet little thing," and once more he tipped up the gin bottle for Sam's benefit.

"Better stay away from her yourself, then," Carrigan retorted.

"I didn't ask you for advice. I asked you if you had enough of your old wallop left to press this guy's pants for him. That's all I want to know."

"Oh, all right," Sam decided. "Where's that gin? All I'll have to do is to be careful not to break a hand on him."

Impatiently Val poured him still another drink.

"Now take him out to the garage and borrow a match from him, or something," he suggested.

They sauntered over to the other table, and Val asked Norma to dance. She arose, after an instant's hesitation; she knew that she danced well, and wanted to be at her best before Donald; he would watch her, she knew.

Sam dropped into her chair, and began the recital of the story he and Val had rehearsed on the way over to the table. The chauffeur who had brought Norma and Donald out to the inn was drinking heavily and cutting loose generally, Sam declared. Hadn't Donald better come out to the garage and take a look at him?

"Seems to me," Sam explained, "as if he's too plastered to take you folks back to town." During his greatest popularity in the prize ring, Sam had done a turn in vaudeville, and he rather prized his flair for acting. "Better come right now and take a look at your driver," he continued earnestly, "because if you wait too long maybe you can't get another one. Be a shame to keep that little lady out here all night."

"Lord, yes," Donald agreed, rising. "How do you get to the garage?" Sam fell in behind him and they left by a rear entrance. Donald turned for one last look at Norma in the arms of Ricardo—he hated leaving her there. Oh, well, he could hurry back!

Sam looked his man over. Gee, he was a big fellow, and well put together! Shame to battle this clean-looking guy. But, at that, he probably could take care of himself for awhile, at least, and Sam was itching for a scrap, just to keep his hand in.

They had reached the entrance of the garage when Sam bluntly recited the remainder of his little piece. Donald Morgan was to lay off this girl; she was the lady friend of the guy she was dancing with now.

"You're a liar," Donald said hotly.

"Who says so?" was Sam's belligerent reply, obviously forcing the issue. Then he added a few details about Norma's reputation, which might have been true had Norma been Betty.

Donald swung at him. And an instant later the chauffeurs had given up a good penny ante game and formed a circle around two splendid fighting machines in combat.

It was a good fight, with Sam's professional ring generalship opposed by Donald's clean-bodied amateurism—an amateurism which took account of his almost daily bouts with mine workers back home. Even Sam had to admit that he was there. The former prize fighter divined at once that this man was to outlast him; in the matter of wind Donald had it over him like a tent.

And again the code of the West Side gutters came to the fore. Here was a guy who didn't show a bit of yellow, who, in fact, stood up and fought like a man. It almost made Sam think of his last battle in the old Madison Square Garden, where he had finally taken the count in the ninth round at the hands of the champion. He came to admire Donald's skill and agility as they circled each other, rushed, jabbed, countered, clinched and broke away.

"That's a peach of a left," he grunted admiringly. "Where'd you learn it?"

Donald sensed the sportsmanship of the remark.

"How's this right?" he asked, as he planted an iron fist a bit too high on Sam's jaw. Carrigan staggered, nevertheless.

"Say, kid!" he gasped. "If you'd stop telegraphing your blows you'd make a real fighter." Then, almost punch drunk, he dropped his arms.

Now was the time for Donald to "bury" him, but he shoved out a big right hand to shake Sam's. They fell playfully into each other's arms.

"Boy, you're great!" Sam pronounced between gasps. "Where'd you learn to handle yourself?"

"Oh," Donald replied, "I did a little of it at college, and I've had to keep it up since; half my men wouldn't work for me if I couldn't lick the tar out of 'em. They like bare-knuckle stuff."

"Well, I'm for you strong. You come to Mike Grogan's gym to-morrow morning, and I'll show you how to stop telegraphing. And I'll show you a few tricks that 'll put you where you ought to be. Say, how old are you? Twenty-six. That's not too old—let me manage you, get a string of easy matches for you, and first thing you know I bet we'd make a real fighter of you. What do you say?"

Donald grinned and shook his head.

"Got a job of my own," he replied. "Now, take back the lies you told me about Miss Barry."

"Sure," Sam admitted cheerfully, wincing at the pain of his cut lips. "That whole show was a frame-up."

"Not yours."

"Nope."

There was no need of more questions. Donald's chin set grimly as he glanced back over his shoulder toward the inn, from which the wail of a saxophone came plaintively.

He had been a sucker. He had been framed, and hadn't had sense enough to know it. And now he had a black eye, his trousers were torn and smeared with dirt from the one knockdown that he had suffered, and his shirt was a grimy rag. Sam's kidney punches had left him aching. What on earth would he say to Norma? Why, he couldn't even face her like this!

"Sure, you were framed," Sam repeated. "That guy Val is as crazy as a loon if anybody gets him jealous, and you got his goat the minute he saw you with that jane. Better steer clear of him; he packs a knife. Say, the guy that runs this joint is a friend of mine; I'll get some pants and a couple of shirts off him for us."

"I've got to send word in to Miss Barry, first," Donald explained. "And say, how about a piece of beefsteak for this eye of mine?"

"Give me the note, old-timer," one of the chauffeurs suggested, "and I'll take it in and bring the steak back."

Donald, sitting on the running board of a taxi, scribbled a note to Norma and gave it to the man. Then he scrubbed more of the battle marks from his face and hands and sat back to wait for her answer, meanwhile learning that the place he had thought a charming, quiet little inn was very lenient in serving liquor.

His answer came promptly from the head waiter.

"Miss Barry left ten minutes ago."

"Gone!" Donald exclaimed incredulously. "Why, she can't be. You got the wrong table. The window table in the corner on the other side, and she wore a blue—"

"She's gone all right," the chauffeur told him. "Went with a fellow she'd been dancing with."

Donald turned to Sam.

"She wouldn't go with him," he said, more to reassure himself than for any other reason.

"Say, listen, he could get 'most any

woman to go with him," Sam mumbled through his swollen lips. "Probably he gave her a song and dance about you not coming back. Better come in and eat with me, buddy; my treat."

Since Donald Morgan had beaten him Sam had begun to develop a feeling of friendliness for the young Westerner. A clean-cut guy like that certainly was too good to get the raspberry from any skirt, even one as pretty as that kid in blue.

"You got to clean him up if you don't want him messing around in your business," Sam went on. "Say the word and I'll do it for you!" More than that he could not offer any man.

Donald declined both the offered hospitality and Sam's last suggestion.

"Good boy!" Sam agreed. "You're the kind that does his own dirty work."

Donald returned to town and telephoned Norma at once. She was not at home. She was out the next morning when he called. Cecile had sent for her to go on an all-day expedition to the Ramapo Hills.

Donald phoned his lawyer, and half an hour later was sending Norma a telegram from the Pennsylvania Station, before departing for Washington. The landlady, who considered Miss Barry too snippy for any use because she wouldn't take a sociable drink once in awhile, did not bother to mention to her the telegram that had slipped down behind the hall hatrack.

For both of the young people the world suddenly became a dreary waste, not worth living in. The future was merely a succession of gray days that must somehow be lived through.

### VIII

EVENTS moved swiftly during the following week. Donald Morgan, in Washington, found that having the truth on his side was not half so important as he had thought, when there were skillful lawyers opposing him.

Norma Barry, in New York, followed in the footsteps of many another, and learned that often, when you get what you have always wanted, it doesn't make you happy after all. She had lovely clothes, plenty of money, interesting surroundings, and they meant nothing to her without Donald.

Val Ricardo, racking his brains for some way of making sure of her, had hit upon a new scheme which greatly increased her financial resources.

"I'm making money so fast, giving dancing lessons," he said one evening. "Why don't you do it, too?"

"But I don't know enough," she protested. It had been a hot, humid day when merely breathing was an effort, and she felt too tired and listless to care whether she ever had any money or not.

"Of course you do. Haven't I taught you? These women I teach, they cannot dance with me all the time; I'm in great demand. Now, I'll recommend you as a teacher for the men they know, and you'll get—let's see, you might get twenty-five dollars an hour."

He had raised his own price to forty, and was getting it, thanks to the incidental love-making which was included.

Norma's lack of interest piqued him. By the next evening he had rounded up two pupils for her, and during the week of Donald's absence she gave five lessons. She could not help feeling that she had no right to the money; if a policeman had tapped her on the shoulder and demanded it she would have handed it over without a murmur.

With Donald gone from her life the old zest for buying clothes and wanting to look her best was gone. She had saved some money with the unexpressed hope that she would want it for a trousseau; now she lent it to Betty.

Most of the lesson money went to a girl who lived in the same house with her and had just learned that she had tuberculosis and would have to go to Arizona. Val had taken a ten per cent commission on Norma's takings; she would have given him more if he had asked for it.

"Isn't it funny, I used to think that I'd be perfectly happy if I had money enough to live on and take singing lessons with," she told Betty one morning when they were breakfasting at a cafeteria near their boarding house. When they felt rich they calmly ate there; when they felt poor they went to a charming French restaurant in Fifty-Seventh Street, to bolster themselves up mentally.

"You're fussing over your two-gun man from the Rockies," Betty retorted. "Stop it. Gee, if any man treated me the way he has you, ducking out for home without even sending you a bunch of forget-me-nots, I wouldn't wear myself out thinking about him. Let me tell you something, honey; fellows like that get lonesome when



they hit the big town, and they want a little playmate. Fine!

"When they light out for home they forget the girl who kept 'em from eating their ham and eggs alone. If they're white they give a girl a nice present, but your guy wasn't. Well, you've learned your lesson, I guess.

"That club of Cecile's is alive with millionaires; pick one for yourself, now that that dog in the manger's cleared out. Don't be a fool another time."

"But, Betty, I don't think he's gone off home, somehow. He's not that kind," Norma protested. "He may be mad because I went home with Val that last time I went out with him."

"Yeh, he had a right to be mad, getting drunk that way."

"But maybe he—"

"Listen, when you have to keep saying 'maybe' about a fellow, something's wrong. You don't know men, and I do—this kind, anyway."

Norma remained unconvinced. Under the pretense of wanting another baked apple, she left the table, and by the time that she had made the trip around the long lane that encircled the food tables she could keep her lips from trembling as they always did when Donald Morgan was mentioned.

Queer how unattractive the club had become, she reflected. Its glamour was gone; it had become merely the place where she worked for a living. Her dainty evening gowns were only a uniform. She no longer cared about looking her best; just to be presentable was enough.

Betty commented on that fact one night when she sauntered into their dressing room and found Norma reading.

"Listen, honey," she began, and Norma winced, knowing full well what sort of remarks to expect. "You're slipping. You used to chase out and practice dancing when you got here early; now you mope around in this stuffy hole and read. The crowd's beginning to come early, too."

"I'm not moping!" Norma flared up indignantly. She was getting tired of Betty's everlasting advice.

"Well, you're reading; that's just as bad. Say, are you in love with that wild man from the Great Divide?"

"No, of course not!"

"Glad to hear it." Betty hunched up on the little stool before the cluttered

dressing table, and began to bead her eyelashes. "I certainly am glad to hear it, because he's just come in and asked Louis for his old table."

"What? Oh, Betty, really? Why didn't you tell me sooner? Oh, you're just kidding me!"

"Honest to Gawd, he's out there. Now, you keep your head and treat him like dirt, and you'll be rid of him."

But Norma was excitedly sliding out of her third-best frock to put on her best one, her cheeks so pink and her eyes so bright that Betty said "Gosh!" in admiration.

"Betty, do I look all right?" Norma demanded nervously. "Oh, my hair! I wish I'd had it washed. Betty, would you wear a flower on the shoulder or just go this way? Betty, how does he look? Maybe he's been sick. Betty—"

"There you go again—maybe!" Betty groaned. But Norma was slamming the door behind her and didn't hear.

She told herself that she wouldn't even glance in Donald's direction. And when she couldn't avoid speaking to him she'd be very cool and offhand about it. Cordial, of course—it wouldn't do to let him know that she'd minded not seeing him—but nothing more.

Which was all very well in intent. But when her eyes met his, over the shoulder of the college boy with whom she was dancing, her knees shook and her heart turned to quicksilver. Fire was in her veins, instead of blood, and her feet began to go their own way so completely that her partner exclaimed: "Say, I don't know that step! Teach it to me, will you?"

"He's here," Norma murmured, as he swung her around, wishing that she had eyes in the back of her head so that she could still see Donald.

"Not here? Oh, no, of course not. But could I have a lesson to-morrow?" The college boy was puzzled, but elated.

Norma pulled herself together and smiled at him so bewitchingly that he began to plan an immediate marriage; what was a college diploma, anyhow? He could not know that the smile was merely an overflow from the exuberance created by the sight of another man.

"I'm going to be awfully busy from now on," she told him. "But then, I might take you to-morrow at three." She'd want some clothes now—perhaps even that trousseau.



Norma was radiant when she sat down at Donald's table. He had leaped to his feet and grasped both her hands. Now, sitting across from her, he looked at her as if he would never look away.

"You didn't answer my telegram," he said at last. "Why not?"

"Telegram? But I didn't get any. I didn't even know you were out of town."

They went over the ground at length, happily, now that they were together again and nothing else mattered. The separation and misunderstanding had drawn them closer together than ever. Then he noticed the pearls about her throat.

"Where'd you get those?" he demanded; he had known pearls in the days before his father's death, when his mother wore them.

"Oh, these? Val gave them to me."

His eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Oh, he did! Rather an expensive gift."

"They're just an imitation, silly. He bought them from one of these men who sell them on the street."

"Let me see them."

She unfastened the clasp, and they lay in the palm of his hand an instant later, still warm from her flesh. That angered him. To have another man, and such a one, give her anything that could come so close to her!

"They're genuine," he announced after an inspection. "You can't let him give you anything so valuable as these. Probably he stole 'em."

The meeting with Donald had thrown Norma into such complete emotional upheaval that she could not control herself. She could not bear the tone of criticism in his voice, her resentment rising the more quickly because of the unceasing harangue which she had suffered from Betty Jordan during his absence.

"He didn't steal them!" she retorted hotly. "He makes loads of money, giving dancing lessons. And he's helped me to make some, too, the same way. He gets forty dollars an hour and I get twenty-five."

To Donald, who had earned his money by hard work, it was incredible that any one could make that much by doing something that was merely play. Furthermore, he resented Val's doing anything for Norma.

His own affairs were in a hopeless mess;

it appeared quite likely that he would lose all he had. If that happened, he couldn't ask her to marry him. And here was this dancing man, this rotter, making money without half trying, and helping her to make it, too!

Abruptly he thrust the pearls into his pocket.

"That's one way to keep you from being a thief's accomplice," he told her grimly, mindful of the information about Val that he had gleaned from Sam Carrigan.

"Give them back to me!" she ordered, stretching one slim arm out across the table. "They're mine. You can't treat me this way!"

"You can't take a thousand dollars' worth of pearls from a crook."

"You don't know that he's a crook. At least he doesn't take a girl away out into the country somewhere and then get so drunk he can't take her home!"

"So that's what he told you, is it?" He had gripped her extended hand in his, was holding it tightly. Angry as she was she could not help liking that. "Now, you listen to me." Quickly he gave her the facts. "What have you to say to that?" he demanded.

She would have given in then, but—ignorant of women as he was—he released her hand because some one at the next table was watching them amusedly. Norma's melting mood suddenly congealed. Her heart told her that he was telling the truth, but sheer perversity governed her tongue.

"Your story's no better than his," she found herself saying. "He's been very kind to me."

"His friendship can't do you any good."

"He's taught me to dance, and helped me to get pupils."

"He'll help you into jail before he's through."

Tears trembled behind her eyelids. Realization that the argument was her fault made her angry at him, and disappointment at having her happiness shattered made her utterly wretched. Oh, why did things have to go this way!

She found herself talking, saying bitter, biting things that sounded like an echo of Betty's words. Oh, surely this would end in a moment.

He'd stop sitting there with his mouth drawn into a straight line and his eyes stony, and would take her hand again.

Pleadingly she stretched it across the table, but he gave no sign of seeing it. Her voice died tremulously into silence.

Donald's mind, too, was in a tumult. He had failed with her, he told himself, because that Broadway smart Aleck for whom he had such contempt had outclassed him. He felt big, and awkward, and realization of impending financial disaster cut sharply into his self-confidence.

What would any girl want of him, especially a girl as beautiful and charming as Norma? He'd better clear out, go back to the land where he belonged, and take to mucking again if he couldn't get anything better.

Self-pity threatened to engulf him, but the sight of Val Ricardo, coming out for his dance with Cecile Wallace, shocked him out of it. That popinjay, with his plastered hair and his mechanical smile, making his money off women. Donald sat up straight, squared his shoulders, and muttered a few words that were worthy of Sam Carrigan himself.

"Norma," he began, wondering just how he could go back over the last few moments and clear up the situation, "don't you see that—"

Despite her anger, she was prepared to see anything. But at that moment a waiter came to her with word that Steve Chamberlin wished to see her at his table.

"Good Heavens, can he send for you like that?" Donald demanded as she arose. He had arisen, too, and stood glowering down at her, furious over having their reconciliation interrupted. "And do you have to go?"

As disappointed as he, she could only nod. He took for willing acquiescence what was merely submission to duty, and let her go without another word. And Norma went, biting her lips to keep from crying, yet not daring to refuse Steve, because she knew that to do so would anger Cecile and perhaps result in her losing her job.

Chamberlin nodded to her curtly. His affair with Cecile had grown out of bounds. She was refusing invitations from him now, having delivered an ultimatum a few days before.

He was to persuade his wife to divorce him, and marry her, or she would have no more of him. He hated Cecile's cold, calculating streak, yet she still fascinated him. There was enough of the brute in his char-

acter to make him the victim of a corresponding trait in her.

"How about taking a little trip with Cecile and me?" he asked Norma, almost before she sat down. "She can get away for to-morrow night if she wants to; I know that. I've bought a country place for her down on Long Island, right where she wants to live, and—well, we've had trouble lately, but if I can get her down there and show her the place, give her a chance to see what living in it would be like, why, she'll be reasonable."

"Isn't she reasonable now?" Norma asked, merely to say something. How could she go away, with things as they were between her and Donald? He might go away again and she'd never see him any more!

"She's anything but!" Chamberlin groaned and reached for the drink that stood at his elbow. "Wants me to ask my wife for a divorce. She doesn't know my wife! And the family would never stand for it. I'd lose about two million by getting in wrong with them now. But Cecile—well, you know her. So we'll run down to the Island to-night when this place closes and stay till day after to-morrow. You'll be chaperon enough."

"Wouldn't it do just as well to go Thursday instead?" Norma asked.

Chamberlin frowned. Accustomed to having his own way save when his wife opposed him, he resented the thought that any one, especially a person who belonged to a class that he felt was inferior to his own, should not instantly fall in with his plans.

"We'll go to-night," he said. "Got any street clothes here? All right; everything else you need 'll be down at the house. We'll leave as soon as Cecile can duck out of here."

He arose just then, as Cecile approached the table; for Norma he had not arisen. Norma turned to look over her shoulder for Donald. He was not there. Half an hour later she was getting into Steve's car, even more desolate than she had felt before seeing Donald again. The doorman bent over her as he closed the door of the car and dropped a little packet into her lap.

"I was asked to give you this, miss," he told her. She knew from the weight of the package that Donald had returned Val's pearls to her, and sat staring down at them, not noticing that the doorman's

hand was conveniently placed and opened so that she could give him a tip. He turned on his heel and went off, glowering. Quite unintentionally Norma had made an enemy.

## IX

NORMA BARRY had never imagined anything like the luxury of the country home which Steve had bought for Cecile. The house itself was charming, a mellowed old farmhouse of the type which usually appeals to the women whose garish lives make them long for obvious respectability. Within, it had been skillfully remodeled so that it boasted every aid to comfort, and the furnishings were so perfectly in harmony with the period of the house's building that the atmosphere was beyond Cecile's understanding.

"It's nice," she told Steve, almost grudgingly, as she stood in the wide hall after finishing a tour of the house. "But of course I'd have to change these," with a gesture toward the hooked rugs. "I like Orientals, something really rich. And painted furniture; it's smarter, and some nice carved pieces. And I want an Italian bedroom. I like nice, bright colors around me; I'm too temperamental for this kind of stuff. I could do that living room so it 'd be stunning; orange walls, and taffeta curtains—"

Norma turned and hurried out into the garden; the hall, which ran the length of the lower floor, opened onto it. There was a high wall on three sides, a wall of old brick, against which delphinium swung delicate blue bells.

Some late irises stood in purple state in front of it, and old-fashioned pinks and scrambling pink and white Sweet William edged the wide border of flowers. Masses of green promised a wealth of Rambler roses in a few weeks' time, and the fine green of honeysuckle sprayed over the wall all along one side.

At the end of the garden there was no wall; the sea came creeping lazily up over the sand there, toward the low dike that protected the flowers at high tide.

"Oh, how could she talk of changing all this?" Norma cried to herself, turning to glance up at the old white house, with its weathered, blue-green shutters. "It's such a loving house, with all those ruffly dimity curtains, and the maple furniture, and those darling rugs. Oh!"

She wanted to be alone all that sunny day, free to sit in the garden or on the beach, or to wander about the wide, friendly rooms and glory in their unpretentious beauty. Cecile Wallace would wreck it all, stamp it with the shoddiness of her beloved Broadway. She'd give cocktail parties in the quaint old garden. She was talking even now of tearing out the great bed of monthly roses and putting in a swimming pool; Norma could hear her.

"But you can swim in the ocean," Steve protested. The beauty of the old house had placed its hand on his heart as it had on Norma's.

"Everybody has a swimming pool, you chump," Cecile retorted, giving him an affectionate little pat on the arm. As a rule she was chary of caresses with him, determined to make him earn even the least of her favors.

Since she had grown sure of him she no longer cared for him, but only for what he could give her; a taste for many men had spoiled the capacity for devotion to one. The house had quite restored her to good humor, however, and she was willing to make small concessions.

"Of course I'll have a swimming pool," she went on. "And listen, Steve, that barn won't hold more than three cars; it'll have to be done over at once. Oh, and the bathroom off my bedroom's bad; I've simply got to have a sunken tub in there, and a fireplace."

She would not let Norma go out of her sight. This would be no long, dreaming day in which to think over that disastrous meeting with Donald, and to plan an apology to him, and let love flow out to him in a great, surging flood that must bring him back!

Cecile was shrewdly bringing her affair with Steve to just the place where she wanted its climax to come; she had forced him to realize how pleasant life with her would be, and now she was tantalizing him by hinting that he could never share it with her. She refused to grant him even the liberties she would have permitted any other man of her acquaintance to take. In Cecile's life a kiss was as common as a handshake, but Steve was not allowed to kiss her, now that she had him well snared.

She did let him kiss her that night, at the foot of the stairs, and again in the morning, however, since he had given her this house that so nearly fulfilled her de-

sires. They breakfasted in the garden the morning of that second day.

Norma, who had slipped hastily into her plain blue frock, sat back in amazement as Cecile got into a trailing negligee of flame color, and touched her lips and throat and palms with heavy, insidious perfume.

"This is the big day, honey," Cecile told her as she led the way down the gracious old stairway. "Here's where I wind things up." In her exultation she would talk even to Norma of what lay next her heart. "You stick around till I give you the high sign, and then clear out."

Norma had always supposed that women of Cecile's type won their game by love-making; it startled her to see how tricks were taken by good fellowship and entertainment. Cecile had sat on the terrace the evening before and told delightful stories; she had found that Steve felt comfortably superior when he was able to contrast his own upbringing with her helter-skelter childhood in Hell's Kitchen.

She had sung charming little songs in her husky contralto, and when at last they went into the house to have a final drink by the big fireplace, she had played dominoes with him, and let him beat her. As a child Steve had always been beaten at that pastime by an older brother, and the memory had never ceased to rankle. He quite forgot having told Cecile about it, but she was far too clever to forget anything that might be of use to her.

Norma found treasure trove in the bookshelves that lined the room's inner wall; a battered old set of Dickens and another of Thackeray; "Moby Dick" and "Around the World in Eighty Days"; and "Paradise Lost." How marvelous it would be to sit by that big fireplace on winter nights with Donald and read, and eat apples and popcorn, and play with some huge, shaggy dog.

"Funny how women like Cecile manage to get what they want out of life," she reflected as they went up to bed.

"Norma!" Cecile exclaimed, cutting in sharply on her thoughts. "You heard him say this house is mine, didn't you? You heard that? Because if he should change his mind I'll want you for a witness. I think I can fix it so that he'll make it over to you, right away, see, but really it'll be mine, and you'll give me a letter saying you know it is. There may be some scan-

dal about the divorce, and I don't want to mess into it."

"But wouldn't I get into it, then?" Norma asked.

"Heavens, no! Nobody's going to recognize your name, but if some fool lawyer's clerk saw my name on the papers, like as not he'd spill the beans. Heavens knows I want publicity, but not scandal! I'm going to get what I want now, and get it right. See this!" Triumphant she showed Norma a note which Steve had scribbled the evening before at the night club and sent in to her. It read:

DARLING:

I want you more than anything else on earth. I've always told you that. Nobody else matters. Be kind to me, sweetheart, and I'll clear everything up as soon as possible. I love you.

STEVE.

"See!" Cecile held it out to Norma. "I'll keep that, along with everything else I've ever got from him; I've filed the whole business in a little cabinet, all the cards he's sent with flowers, all the telegrams, every damned word he's ever put on paper. And if he tries to slide out—oh, I've got the goods on Steve Chamberlin all right. Just let him try any funny business!"

"But—he seems so nice, so kind—" Norma began hesitantly.

"Yeh! And what does he want for it!" She laughed; coarse, jeering laughter, yawned, slid out of her clothes, sauntered across the room to close a window that let in the brisk sea air, paused to scratch one shoulder, and went to bed.

Norma turned away, loathing the speed with which Cecile in private dropped every vestige of the refinement which she so carefully cultivated when she was with Steve Chamberlin.

They motored back to town on the second day. Cecile had dismissed her during the afternoon, and Norma had intended to spend it in the garden, but had found to her dismay that she could overhear the conversation that was going on in the living room.

"Sure I'll hang out for marriage," Cecile was saying; her full, strong voice carried as Norma started down the path toward the beach. "And how about a little present in the meantime, if you don't want me to leave you flat and take up with Dan Wycoff? He's crazy about me—well, a necklace, then; that one you gave your



wife last week 'll do. She'll never miss it. But I want that one—the design—”

“She's just testing her power over him,” Norma reflected, as she took refuge in a little hollow in the sand, beside a low dune. “She's greedy now, and she won't be happy till she's got all he has. How can they call it love, that feeling he has for her, when it's love that I have for Donald, too?”

They arrived at the club rather late, to find the manager anxiously awaiting Cecile's coming. Five minutes after she talked with him she sent for Val Ricardo. He strolled into her dressing room and sat down, to play with a new gold cigarette lighter and comment on the process of her making-up.

“Getting your eyelashes a little heavy,” he told her, with the air of a connoisseur. “Give you too much mascara, and you look coarse as—”

“Val, what about Mrs. Wycoff's necklace?” she demanded, turning to face him.

“I don't know; what about it?” he answered, but his fingers tightened on the lighter.

“That's what I'm asking you. Don't try to outsmart me. It was stolen this evening, and I know who took it. Come across.”

“All right, I'll bite; who took it?”

“Listen; you took it when you were dancing with her! This isn't the first complaint I've had. Mrs. Sid Lewis lost a bracelet, and Sheila Lawrence lost a bar pin the night she was guest of honor after her new show opened, but she didn't howl because she got a bigger one out of her sweetie on the strength of it.

“Now along comes this string of diamonds. You took it, and I've got the goods on you. I've told you I wouldn't have anything raw pulled off here, and I mean it. Hand over that necklace, and get out and stay out. You're through.”

“You can't give me the air that way,” he told her pleasantly. “I'll sue you for libel if you don't shut up.”

“Tell me another. Do I call in the dicks or do you come clean and get out? You were seen taking it.”

“Say, listen, Cecile—”

“I've got the goods on you, I tell you.” She had arisen and taken a step toward him, her chin thrust out, all that was brutal and savage in her suddenly surging up through the veneer that she still clung to

even when she was with him. “Come clean!”

“Who saw me, if you're so damned sure?”

“Betty.”

“That little— Say, listen, Cecile, she was crazy about me, and I turned her down because I'd lost my head over you; I never told you because I knew I wasn't big enough for you to look at. Betty's jealous, that's all, and she's trying to get even.”

Cecile's vividly painted lips twisted into a crooked, sneering smile.

“And that's a lot of apple sauce,” she commented. He had taken one of her hands and was fondling it in both his own. She withdrew it with a jerk and slapped him smartly across the face.

“You filthy swine!” she ejaculated. She whirled and caught up the telephone that stood on her dressing table. “Maude,” she said to the switchboard girl, “send Cutter in here.”

“Oh, say, Cecile, listen—Cecile, I swear—oh, all right.” Val thrust one hand into his pocket and tossed on the table a glimmering, fire-bright chain, whose every tiny link was set with a diamond.

“There it is!” he exclaimed, and the white, bitter fury of his face made it an ugly thing to look upon. “You needn't think this is all there is to it, though; I'll get even.”

“Get out!” Cecile was twining her fingers through the glittering chain, staring down at it as it coiled in her lap. “I'll give Sam your check for you.”

Greed curved her thin lips and brightened her eyes as she bent over the jewels. She was too much absorbed in them to notice that Val, as he went out, caught up the hand bag that she had tossed on a chair near the door.

Later, distracted over its absence, she searched wildly for it, and found it in the passageway. The note which Steve had scribbled to her two evenings earlier was missing.

She knew Val too well to have any doubts as to what had happened to it. Sending for her brother, who filled the post of unofficial bouncer at the club, she told him what had happened.

“Now, I want you to get him tonight,” she concluded. “He'll go to Steve's wife with it, and there'll be hell to pay. He knows too much, anyway. Get him good; put him out of the way. You

can locate him and say you want to give him the money. Have a few drinks and then beat him up till he'll be in the hospital for months. And get that letter."

"But he's a friend of mine," protested Sam, who might have a queer moral code, but stuck to it. "I can't do that."

"Well, get a gang together then. Chase him down and let me know where he is; I want to see this business through myself. I'll tell you—I'll take a crowd and say I'm going slumming, and come down to Porter's—take him to Porter's, Sam, and wait till I get there before you pull anything."

Cecile had more than a touch of that quality which moved the Vestal Virgins to turn down their thumbs at contests to the death in the ancient Colosseum.

Sam Carrigan nodded and went out. At the door of the club he met Donald Morgan, who had come in response to a telegram from Norma.

"Better come along with me to-night if you want to see the town," Sam told him. "I'll show you a swell time."

"Can't; got a date," Donald answered.

"My show runs till morning."

Donald grinned. "Think I'll like mine better."

"Oh, all right. But you're turning down a good bet. Say, I guess I'll go back in with you and do some phoning; Cecile might as well pay the bill."

Norma Barry came straight to Donald, and when he sat down beside her he reached beneath the table and took her hand tightly in his own. She smiled up at him, so contentedly that he felt sure that at last they had come to journey's ending. But her delicate face was distressed when she began to talk.

"I can't go to supper with you to-night after this place closes," she told him. "I thought I could when I wired. Cecile's got some kind of slumming expedition on and wants me to go with her. I don't dare refuse."

"Honey, we've got to have a chance to talk!"

"I'll lose my job if I don't go."

"But—even at that—"

She loved him so much that she wanted him to ask her to marry him, then; he loved her so much that he would not ask her until he felt sure that he could support her. They had reached the place where they must either go forward or stop altogether. For both of them the happiness

of their meeting faded as tension grew between them.

"Find out where you're going and I'll be there, too," he urged, as she drew back in her chair and folded her hands in her lap.

"It's a place called Porter's."

"All right. I'll see you there. How soon do you leave?"

"As soon as the crowd begins to thin out here, and Cecile's told the orchestra leader not to play very often or very long; she wants to slow things down so they'll leave early. She isn't even doing an exhibition dance to-night; Val's sick or something."

She left him then, and he hastened to the phone booths and found Sam just leaving.

"Changed my mind," Donald announced. "How about taking me to a place called Porter's? Do you know it?"

Sam glanced at him suspiciously. "What's the big idea?" he demanded. Then, when Donald had explained: "Oh, all right. Better think up a name that you won't care if it lands on a police blotter, that's all, and don't drink anything out of anybody's flask but mine. Now we'll chase over to a joint I know and pick up a taxi; I don't want any strange driver to-night."

"What's up?"

"Oh, just a little party, that's all—and you know the guy that's the guest of honor." Sam grinned happily as he started on his man hunt.

It led along Speakeasy Street, to Broadway cafés, to a Chinese restaurant, to an apartment in a narrow building between two theaters in the furious Forties, to a dignified old house in the Fifties, where imported motor cars stood thick at the curb. Sam cursed under his breath, and Donald sat and thought of Norma, and resented the way that New York had pushed him into a groove where he did not belong, robbing him of all ability to govern his own life.

## X

THE search for Val Ricardo ended at a dairy restaurant in Columbus Circle, well after midnight. Val was eating wheat cakes and drinking coffee when Sam cornered him. Carrigan eyed his man thoughtfully; Val must have pulled off a pretty good thing to stop thinking about his figure long enough to eat that way.

"Lo, what's the good word?" Sam asked, sliding into a chair.

"What's new yourself?" Val retorted.

"I've got some money for you," Sam remarked, flicking the check across the table. "Cecile says she had a run in with you."

"She's too damned cheeky since she's running with Steve Chamberlin," Ricardo remarked coolly.

Sam shrugged his shoulders; Cecile's affairs were none of his business, he inferred.

"How about passing that up for something stronger?" he asked, with a nod at Val's coffee cup. "Porter's got some swell new stuff; wants me to drop in and try it. Drinks on the house to-night. Come on along."

"Don't care if I do." Val picked up his check, threw down a dime for the waitress, then picked it up. "I'll match to see who pays this check."

"Gimme the check right now," Sam ordered, taking it. "I've matched with you before. You'd have my shoes before we got out of here."

In high good humor Val led the way out to the curb. He drew back when he saw Donald waiting in the taxi. "What's up?" he demanded of Sam. "Why the body-guard?"

"Oh, can't a guy from the sticks see the big town if he wants to?" Sam said, and shoved him into the seat beside Donald. "Don't be so snooty. What are you scared of?"

Val settled back in his corner and lighted a cigarette. He regarded Donald pityingly, contemptuously. Sam began to talk, discussing a big fight that was slated for the next night; trying to drag Val into an argument over Dempsey, too. And the taxi went slithering down town over pavements wet by a sudden downpour of warm rain, through streets that were silent save when huge trucks went thundering by.

Porter's was on the second floor of a dingy old building in Bleeker Street, well east of the gayety of Greenwich Village. There was a narrow stairway down which men had come scuttling on various occasions like rats leaving a sinking ship. There was a large front room, and a smaller one at the back opening from it by a wide door, with a kitchen at one side.

Sam and Val greeted the proprietor, Donald was introduced, and a bottle of Scotch brought forth. It was the same

Scotch that they could have bought at hundreds of other places, but even Sam, hardboiled though he was, was likely to be guileless in the presence of well-labeled liquor.

There were friends of Sam's present, men who were scattered about the room, two at one table, three at another.

"Old home week?" Val asked, noting their presence. "Isn't that the guy who used to train with you, over there, the big bruiser?"

"Naw, never saw him before," Sam lied. "Somebody's spilled the beans about this booze down here; Joe'll sell the cargo to-night. That guy over there in the yellow tie, he supplies six tea rooms in the Forties, and one of the biggest road houses in Westchester County. Got a great business, and he's the baby to handle it, too."

"Looks like a thug to me," Val commented.

"Hey, Al, this guy says you like a thug," Sam shouted, snatching at the pretext to start a row.

"Biggest compliment I could pay you," Val added, lifting his glass and drinking to the belligerent Al, who had risen promptly and started toward them. "Bet you've got the cops eating out of your hand in your district. Have one on me."

Cecile came in just then, with Norma, Steve Chamberlin, and a friend of Steve's, a blond, innocuous looking young man known as "Sister" Prentice, who had been welterweight champion of his college and still cultivated the appearance which got many an unsuspecting hoodlum into a fight with him.

"Well, here come the keepers and the kept," Val remarked, catching sight of them through the door into the front room.

"What do you mean?" Donald demanded.

"Oh, keep your shirt on. You know what I mean. That angel kid you've been chasing went off on a two days' party Tuesday night—and you know it."

Donald was on his feet, his eyes mere slits in his white, grim face. Val arose, too, smiling a little, one hand thrust into his pocket. Donald knocked him down before he could draw his hand out.

"Take back what you said," he ordered as he stood over the prostrate Val.

Ricardo scrambled to his feet, one side of his face bloody where the flesh over the cheek bone had been cut open.

"Take nothing back," he retorted, and the hand which he revealed had grasped the handle of a glittering line of light.

"She's my girl, and if I don't object—"

"Look out; he's got a knife!" Prentice shouted from the doorway.

Donald, unheeding, swung once more. A girl screamed—Norma's voice; he knew that. Oh, the pity of it, to have her forced to come to such a place as this!

Some one was clutching at his arm as Val, blood streaming from his face, struggled to free himself from the men who had grabbed him as he arose from the second knockdown. It was Norma, white and tense as a little fury.

"Oh, how could you do that?" she cried. "Hitting him like that—down here drinking—you're just like all the rest! Why aren't you decent? You—"

"Miss, he didn't have a drop!" Sam cut in eagerly. But Cecile had caught Norma's hand and dragged her out of the crowd that had gathered, and turning curtly to Prentice, had said: "Take her home!"

"He nicked you that second time, on the arm, sir!" It was a bent, servile old waiter who spoke to Donald. "Better step in here and let me fix it up."

Donald was glad to follow him out of the low, smoke-filled room where men were crowding all about, and Porter himself was demanding an explanation—which Sam was capably giving him. The waiter led the way to a pantry next the kitchen, which opened into the main room as well; the number of doors in the whole establishment was far out of proportion to the size of the place.

Glasses of all varieties were ranged on shelves about the walls, and dirty ones were piled high in the big sink. The waiter washed the cut on Donald's arm and banded it, talking all the while in his soft, polite old voice.

"That boy's a bad one," he assured Donald. "I've known him for years now, ever since he hit Broadway. I come from the same part of town myself, only I aimed up high; I went into service. You wouldn't think it, but I was butler for five years in one of the best homes on Fifth Avenue. Yes, sir. I used to urge that boy to let me give him a start, and I did get him one place, but he got into trouble—All right, all right!"

He concluded irritably, in response to a curt "Hunter, two Bacardi cocktails—the

good stuff!" from Porter as he passed the door. The owner had not noticed Donald, who stood at one side of the sink, or that young man would have been promptly removed to the outer room.

For the old waiter turned to a window that opened on an air shaft, and pulled up a rope, hand over hand. A fine, firm rope it was, and from its end dangled a heavy basket which contained a half dozen bottles of Bacardi. Many ropes hung over that window sill, and apparently many bottles dangled below.

"Neat way to keep it," Donald remarked.

"Yes, sir; just one way of taking care of it in case we're raided; not much danger of that, what with the protection we pay and all, but you can't ever be too careful, the way they keep changing prohibition men in this town. Thank you, sir," as Donald helped him to loosen the rope. "Don't bother about tying it again, sir; I've got to replace that bottle I just took out."

He began mixing the cocktails, and Donald stood absent-mindedly coiling the rope about his arm. There was a touch of home about the feeling of it in his hands. He had handled many such ropes in his boyhood when he visited on an uncle's ranch.

Now, standing there with it slipping through his fingers, he yielded to the vision which it brought, a sharp, clear glimpse of the wide plains and scraggly brush through which he had ridden after cattle. Emotion surged up within him as he thought of a horse he had loved with the devotion of a lonely boy.

His body straightened and he breathed deeper as he recalled the starlit nights when he sat by the camp fire and heard tales of fights with the sheepmen and scraps with Indians, tales which the cowboys embroidered delightedly when they noted his wide-eyed interest. And as he stood thinking the rope turned in his strong, nervous fingers. An honest, capable thing, that rope, too good to be sullied by the use to which it was put!

Donald Morgan had loathed New York, but had been unable to fight its insidious influence. Now, suddenly, he felt as if he had been freed from it, mysteriously. He took his life into his own two hands again, and unfastening the rope from its hook on the window ledge, he stepped into the doorway, still holding it, clinging to it with his



hands as with his mind he clung to the mental vision of himself which he had regained.

Val Ricardo was sitting at the table again, mopping his cut cheek with a handkerchief; he was slouched down in his chair, twisting a glass with his free hand, and Sam was talking to him. Val's eyes were on the glass, and he did not see Sam nod to one of his friends, and then to another.

Nor did he see them change their seats, unobtrusively moving to tables nearer the one where Sam and Val were sitting. One of them took the chair that Donald had left empty; Val, who was muttering beneath his breath, paid no attention to him.

Donald, who had spent so much of his life with reckless men that he was keenly sensitive to the inner meaning of such moments, realized that something significant was taking shape, something menacing, that so far had not gone beyond furtive movements and whispered words.

He had been witness to the end of more than one man hunt on the plains and in the mines; there had been one scrap in the coal mines of West Virginia, where one entire family joined the union and their enemies in a family feud did not, so that they might shoot at each other freely.

But never had he seen a hunt that he disliked so much as this one, for there was nothing clean-cut about it; the victim was being given no chance for his life. Donald had only the greatest contempt for Ricardo, yet it went against the grain to see him sitting there, trapped, and not even aware of it. He knew that the man deserved all the punishment and more, that he would get, yet he rebelled against the craven manner in which it would be meted out to him.

The man who had been so ready to start a row earlier in the evening started another. Donald did not catch the provocative words; they mattered little, after all. But suddenly Val was on his feet, his back against the wall, knife in hand.

The blood was streaming down his cheek again, and over the white shirt front of his perfectly fitting evening clothes. His eyes glittered in his narrow, pallid face.

The man who confronted him was no taller than Val, but he had the wide, thick-muscled shoulders and agile legs of the prize fighter who keeps in trim. There was a smile on his red face, and as he looked

at Val he licked his lips, as if in preparation for tasting something that was going to be very, very good. A killer's heart and a killer's brain had molded this man's life to an animal pattern.

It was like those contests that women like Cecile had witnessed with delight in ancient Rome, when gladiators were pitted against men armed with nets and swords. But Val lost even the slight advantage that he possessed, for Sam Carrigan suddenly jerked the knife from his hand.

Val turned on him, snarling. The red-faced fighter gathered himself for his first blow. And, without actually knowing what he did, Donald let the end of his lasso fly.

Gracefully it hurtled through the air, and its loop settled down over the fighter, pinioning his arms. He was yanked backward, so that he stumbled, and one of his friends had to keep him from falling.

Porter came rushing forward, shouting, heard even above the sudden outburst of voices.

"Hey, what you guys pulling in a respectable joint? Get the hell out of here! Say, you know better than to pull this kind of a mix-up here and get the cops down on me. I ain't going to have a corpse lying around on my floor and driving customers out."

The two bouncers who were hard on his heels grabbed the fighter, who was swearing lustily, still trying to find out just what had happened to him. Under cover of the general commotion Donald slipped out, with a regretful backward glance at the rope, which he hated to leave behind.

He stopped for a moment when he reached the sidewalk; he had been keen enough to note the lay of the land on arriving, and now he was pondering whether to take a cab or head for the Elevated, whose trains rattled through the air a few blocks to the west. Ricardo came running down the stairs as he hesitated.

According to the code Donald had always known, Val should have been grateful for having his life saved. There could have been no doubt in any one's mind that what the red-faced fighter started he would finish, under such circumstances. But Val turned on Donald with venom, his lips drawn back over his teeth like a snarling dog's.

"Say, what do you mean by mixing into my fight?" he demanded. "I saw you standing there with that rope before the

fracas started; I know what it was you pulled off. Think you're smart? Say, in this town we aren't afraid to fight. You've mixed into my business once too often—you stay out from now on or you'll be sorry."

Donald grabbed him by both arms.

"Apologize for what you said about Miss Barry or I'll clean you up right here and now!"

"Well, I—oh, all right. She's straight."

Donald gave him a final shake that made his teeth rattle, and let him go. And Val, straightening his coat collar, started hastily down the street. But before he reached the corner he was walking with his usual nonchalant swagger, as he rearranged the evening's incidents so that they fitted in with his self-esteem.

At the corner he hailed a cab, then waited beside it until Donald was near.

"You may be able to beat me up," he called to him, biting his words off distinctly. "But I've got an inside line with the girl. She showed her hand to-night, didn't she?"

And he jumped into the cab and drove off, leaving Donald to stare wrathfully after him.

## XI

WHEN Steve Chamberlin took Cecile home that evening he suggested that they drive through Central Park first, but she refused. She was too tired to go anywhere, she told him, with the barest pretense of regret.

No, she wasn't sure that she could see him the next day; a big theatrical producer was to be at the club the next evening; he was just about to begin work on a new revue, and she must look her best for him, for good business reasons.

"I've been wasting too much time, really, running around with you," she explained. "I've got to think of my career."

"But I thought that you and I—"

"Yes?"

"Well, you seemed to like me, and—"

"I do. I love you, Steve." Experience had taught her to say it convincingly, even ardently. For a fleeting instant she wished that it were true, that she could recapture the ecstasy of the first days of their acquaintance, when she had been thrilled at the thought of seeing him again after each parting, and had waited eagerly for him to telephone her.

But as soon as he capitulated to her wiles all that had vanished, and he had become only one more man, with marriage the stake to play for because it would mean advancement for her, gratification of her ambitions.

"But I'm not going to make a mess of my life because I love you," she went on, rather enjoying the rôle that she was playing. "I've seen that happen to other girls. I'm not going to become your sweetheart, and then have you get tired of me and throw me over."

"You know that I couldn't ever do that."

"I wouldn't have anything, then, but just the memory of what you'd been to me." She remembered that line from a play. "And even now you show me that you don't really care for me."

"Cecile! Haven't I given you that house?"

"You've said you were going to give it to me."

"It's yours. You urged me to have it made over to Norma, and said you'd arrange matters with her. Well, I'll do that the first thing to-morrow morning, though I can't see why you won't just take it yourself now."

"Yes, but—" She must be careful about this; he mustn't realize that she was trying to get that diamond necklace out of him, and think she was a gold-digger, and turn on her, or she wouldn't even get the house. Playing her cards right, she'd still get everything.

"I've told you that I loved you, and wanted to marry you," she went on. "You say you love me, but you don't care enough for me to ask your wife to divorce you. You're giving me that house, but you gave her a diamond necklace the other day, didn't you? And it's worth twice as much as the house."

"I said I'd give you the necklace, too," he retorted sulkily. With a quick, graceful movement she moved nearer to him and slipped her arm through his.

"I know you did, darling, and you're just too sweet. You know I just want it because I love you so much, and I can't help being jealous of your wife, and I want to be sure that you care for me." She laid her cheek against his. "Steve, you do love me, don't you?"

"Hell, yes!" he groaned, and caught her in his arms. She lay there passively, but

her thoughts were racing. Why not get him to go home now, and get the necklace for her?

Deftly she brought it to pass, and soon afterward their car pulled up across the street from his town house. Cecile drew the collar of her evening wrap high about her face, and settled down as far as possible in a corner of the seat, while Steve went doggedly up the steps and let himself in with his latchkey.

Cecile had been wondering all during the evening whether it would not be possible to keep the necklace which she had made Val give back to her, and tell the woman from whom he had stolen it that she had been unable to recover it. Let Val look out for himself! He hadn't any proof that he had given it to her.

Hitherto quite satisfied with the prospect of marrying Steve, she began to wonder now if she couldn't do better. The necklace he was going to give her, and the one she had got out of Val would bring plenty of money; she could sell the Long Island house, too, as soon as she got it, and go abroad with the money, and perhaps marry a title. She nodded contentedly as she planned that out.

Steve came back at the end of fifteen minutes, and tossed a flat leather box into her lap.

"I'm not coming with you," he told her moodily. "I'm going to stay here."

"But—" She hesitated, not wanting him to come, yet feeling that she ought to pretend that she did; a lively sense of favors to come always governed her at such times. It wouldn't do to let him leave her feeling that she had done him in the matter of the necklace.

"I'll stay here," he repeated. He did not think it necessary to add that his wife had called to him as he left the small sitting room between their bedrooms in which the jewel safe was concealed, and that he intended to hurry back, go upstairs again, and tell her that he had gone down to the library for a book.

He had decided to pretend that the necklace had been stolen, if she discovered its loss before he could replace it. He slammed the door of the car and went back to the house, cursing Cecile for demanding the necklace that night, and himself for being weak enough to yield to her insistence.

A flash of insight into his own character was given him as he hurried across the

street; realization of his own character, which he had thought was as strong as his body, yet which had betrayed him now.

The next morning his athletic, well-nurtured body was found on the third of the three shallow marble steps leading from the street up to the front door of his home. He had been shot.

Steve Chamberlin's death crowded everything else off the front pages of the newspapers—the latest New Jersey murder trial became old stuff, the newest transoceanic flight slid into oblivion. The morning papers carried photographs of Steve, his wife and his children. The evening papers ran pictures of Cecile and the Twenty Club. And the following morning the faces of three women appeared with his—those of Marietta Yolanda Chamberlin, Cecile Wallace, and Norma Barry.

For Cecile, hastening to cover her tracks, had talked. She had been charming to the reporters and the sob sisters who hastened to see her, and had wept a little over the tragic death of "Mr. Chamberlin—he was such a good friend, such a good patron of my little club."

Yes, she had often gone out with him, often sat with him at the club; he had advised her in business matters. As for the motor trips, they were—oh, well, she hated to implicate any one else, but of course everything would come out anyway, wouldn't it? Well, there was a little girl at her club, Norma Barry—apparently a very nice girl, though of course one never could tell! And she had been simply crazy about Mr. Chamberlin, and Cecile had simply insisted on chaperoning the child.

"I knew Broadway so well, myself," she went on plaintively. "I couldn't let a little girl from the country go wrong just through ignorance, could I? Oh, Mr. Chamberlin was always a gentleman! I wouldn't have you think anything else. But she'd be talked about, don't you see, and I—well, I did my best!" And she sighed and leaned back on the cushions of her *chaise longue* and smiled wanly at them.

"Heart of Gold Beneath Tinsel of Broadway," was Cecile's reward in one headline. And Norma found herself dragged into the papers, pitilessly questioned by the district attorney, mauled verbally by reporters when he was through with her.

Who killed Steve Chamberlin? That was what every one wanted to know. Two days after his death another question was added to that first one. What had become of the diamond necklace which he had given to his wife a few days before his murder?

The newspapers speculated on both questions. This might be merely one more of the jewel robberies from which many of the city's richest families had suffered of late. Steve Chamberlin might have come home just as the robbers were leaving, and been shot by one of them.

Along Speakeasy Street that theory was given but little credence, however. For Speakeasy Street knew Val Ricardo; knew Cecile as well, and smiled a little over her efforts to throw dust into the public's eyes by involving Norma Barry.

Every one connected with the club was questioned. Betty, angered by Cecile's attitude, denounced her so violently that she weakened the effect of her own testimony; Norma could only tell the truth, and was so frightened that she contradicted herself where dates were concerned, and did herself more harm than good.

Val Ricardo jauntily announced that both Norma and Cecile were in love with him, that Cecile had been playing Steve for a sucker, that Steve had realized that fact and turned from her to Norma, and that he—Val—was convinced that Cecile had shot him and was hoping to throw the blame on Norma because of her jealousy of the girl, caused by Val's preference for her. He had the satisfaction of seeing himself nicknamed "The Dancing Sheik," and of getting offers from two minor motion picture companies as a result.

The doorman at the club came to Cecile's rescue; a little matter of a liberal tip had cemented the alliance between them, and because of his dislike for Norma he was glad to do what he could to hurt her. He told of Norma's going away with Steve one night; yes, Cecile had gone, too, of course, but he had heard her say as she got into the car, "This chaperoning business is too much for me!"

He had given Norma a package that night, too, that had a necklace in it. How did he know—well, by the feel of it. Yes, Mr. Chamberlin had asked him to slip it to her; he had said something about wanting to give it to her so that Cecile wouldn't see him do it.

And there was something else, too; Miss Barry could handle a gun. He knew, because she usually came to the club early evenings, and he had said to her jokingly one evening that if folks didn't stop trying to crash the gate, he'd have to carry a gun, and she'd said: "I'll teach you how to use it; I'm a crack shot."

Norma's frantic denials had no weight, apparently. To her it seemed that the whole world had gone mad. Over and over she told the truth, and people just smiled and didn't believe her.

She was arrested the second day after Steve Chamberlin's murder. And from the moment when the doors of the Tombs closed upon her, she sank into an apathy from which she could not be roused. Betty had tried in vain to make her tell of her love for Donald Morgan, but she consistently refused.

"Why should I drag him into it?" Norma asked. "He must hate me. I don't see why I was so horrid to him. But I just couldn't bear to see him act like everybody else. I thought all other men were rotten. I'd been so happy with him, I loved him such an awful lot, and then to see him like that—"

Betty had no scruples. She told the reporters and the detectives about Donald, and he was called in, and assured everybody that he and Norma had been engaged. "Lying to save her," was the verdict. If they were engaged why had she flown at him at Porter's when he knocked Val Ricardo down? Why had she run around with Steve Chamberlin?

Even Norma's admission of the truth about the pearls which Val had given her did not seem to help. Val declared that he knew nothing about them. How would he get pearls like those?

"She must have double crossed me!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Taking stuff like that from Chamberlin and telling me that I was the one she cared for! Can't trust a woman, can you?"

And so they went their ways, Cecile and Val complacently, Norma wretchedly, huddling in her corner behind the grim walls that lost their hideousness when they sheltered her from the cruel questioning to which she had been submitted. Anything was better than that!

Donald repeatedly sent her word of his devotion and eagerness to help her, accompanied by all the luxuries which he was



permitted to give her. All his life was focused now on only one thing—exonerating Norma.

When he received word that the lawsuit which had meant so much had been decided in his favor, he was glad only because by selling his share of the mine he could get more money to fight for his sweetheart. Endlessly he conferred with Sam Carrigan, with Betty Jordan, with every one he could reach who might be able to help. And night after night he went to bed swearing that the next day, somehow, he would find Steve Chamberlin's murderer.

With Sam sometimes, but more often alone, he traveled Speakeasy Street, sure that it would help him to learn the truth. The district attorney's men traveled it, too, but Donald had far more faith in himself than in them.

Mrs. Chamberlin, the widow, had gone to her country home in the Berkshires, prostrated. She had told her story straightly enough. She had been awakened the night of the murder by her husband, as he passed through the living room that connected their bed chambers.

She had called to ask him what he was doing, but had not understood his reply, save for the words "Back in a moment." She had waited for him to return, and finally had gone to sleep without hearing him come back upstairs, and in the morning her maid had awakened her with news of his death.

No, she had never known of his friendship for either Cecile Wallace or Norma Barry; he had been a good husband always, but had not cared for the social life which had engrossed her, and had found his amusement elsewhere, she knew. She had believed in him always, and because she had been brought up to believe that a husband's affairs were his own, she had never questioned him. She spoke in love-ly, slurred English, and the sympathy of the world was hers.

Each of the principals in the case accepted his own version of the crime. Not even to Val, who should have been fairly wise in the methods of district attorneys, did it occur that possibly the waters which seemed to be so very still were also very deep.

## XII

BAFFLED wherever he turned, Donald Morgan finally began to play what seemed to be the wildest of hunches. He had gone

over the case endlessly, admitting in turn each theory that had anything at all to support it. Val might have shot Chamberlin; Cecile might have done it; a burglar might have fired the fatal shot.

It might even have been Steve's chauffeur, who had given testimony which agreed with Cecile's all the way through. He had driven his master straight home on the night of the murder, he had sworn, after Cecile was left at the door of her house.

Determined to uncover the truth which he felt Val was hiding, Donald decided to force that sinister young man into telling it. And at last he hit upon the scheme which sent Sam Carrigan idling into the gymnasium where Val, preparing for a part in a picture, was learning to fence.

Sam, to all appearances, was drunk; not ribald, merely talkative. He wanted to discuss the clever way in which Val had made Betty get him a little extra cash one morning not long before the Twenty Club opened—the very day of Val's first meeting with Cecile, wasn't it?

Val, hastily shutting him up, took the safest method of keeping him quiet and escorted him to a dairy restaurant where the coffee cups frequently held something far stronger than Mocha. But Sam talked on. He could remember a lot of things. And he left Val convinced that the best thing he could do was to ease out of town as swiftly as possible, and go as far as he could.

Unfortunately for Ricardo, he had recently yielded to his favorite weakness and spent all his money on clothes, telling himself that a man who was soon to be a motion picture star needed a good wardrobe. He would have to get money somehow, and all the old ways were closed to him temporarily because of the district attorney's interest in him.

He had meant to wait until Cecile sold the necklace which he was sure Steve Chamberlin had given her before producing his trump card, but now he would either have to buy Sam off from recounting any more of his disquieting recollections or leave the country.

He could do well, anyhow, he reflected, by having it out with Cecile. She had kept the necklace she had forced him to give her; he knew that, because its loss had been reported to the police, and he had got out of a most unpleasant situation only

by the skin of his teeth. He would get that from her, and the other one too, he decided, and so dropped in to see her.

He found her smoking a cigarette and reading a French novel; she had picked the book up hastily when he was announced.

"*Bon jour, mademoiselle!*" he exclaimed, bowing low over her hand. She laughed and tossed the book aside.

"French in ten lessons," she remarked. "What's the reason for coming, Val?" She had thought of refusing to see him, but had decided that it would be safer to let him come in and show his hand.

"We might as well be friends," he told her, seating himself on the foot of the *chaise longue* on which she lay. She swept the trailing black lace of her negligee closer about her, as if she feared that it might be contaminated by his touch.

"Yes?" she drawled. "And what else?"

He frowned; she might at least play the game according to the rules. Couldn't she appreciate the setting, and the moment? Val, ever dramatizing himself, failed to realize that every one else did not do the same.

"I suppose you dropped in to ask me if I killed Steve?" she went on mockingly. "You know darned well that you did it yourself."

"No." He accepted the gauntlet which she had thrown down. "I came to ask you to turn over a couple of necklaces, one that you did me out of, and one that you got from him."

For the barest fraction of a second Cecile gave herself away, by the sudden tension of her body, the faintest quiver of emotion that flickered over her face. Then, realizing what had happened, she tried to conceal it by flying into a rage, leaping to her feet, pacing the floor violently, pausing before him as she denounced him, turning away to pace the floor again. But Val sat back smiling, waiting to use the weapon of which he felt so sure.

"You know damned well I haven't got either of them," she told him, finally, as she had already told him over and over again. "I never did have but one, and I gave that back; that cat who owned it is just holding up the insurance company; she's got the necklace safe enough. Norma's got the other; she's welcome to it, too; they say she'll die if they don't let her out soon."

She could not divert him from his purpose.

"Might as well hand 'em over now, Cecile," Val remarked serenely. "I know you've got 'em. And you may have forgotten a little note Steve Chamberlin wrote you, which you—shall we say lost? I've got that, too. Here's a photostat copy of it, if you want proof."

She turned pale, facing him stonily now.

"That—that doesn't mean—that doesn't mean anything," she stammered.

"Perhaps not," he conceded languidly. "But it might interest the D. A. And, listen, baby, I've an idea that he'd like to know something else, too. He'd sit up straight in his chair, wouldn't he, if I went down and told him that I saw Steve give you that necklace of his wife's, about two minutes before he was shot?"

"You didn't!"

"Oh, yes, I did. I followed you two that night, till I saw that you weren't going to your house; then I took a short cut, and hung around in the park opposite his home till you were kind enough to come along and have the car stopped within ten feet of me. I heard what he said to you."

"You wouldn't dare admit that. It would look too much as if you shot him yourself."

"But I know who did it. And that person would confess if a little pressure was brought to bear. Come across, Cecile." He glanced at his wrist watch and arose slowly. "Give me the stuff now; I've got an appointment in ten minutes."

Her retort brought an admiring grin to his face. Never before had he heard such invective. But her threats moved him not at all, and the pleas that followed them were equally vain.

In the end she gave him the two necklaces, and swore at him roundly as he sauntered across the room to the door, swinging his light malacca stick nonchalantly. He paused at the door to turn and throw her a kiss, then slipped out into the hall and hurried down the winding stairs that led to the basement. There was a servants' entrance there, and he made his way unobtrusively to the street, smilingly complimenting himself on his astuteness.

He would walk to the corner, he decided, and take a cab there; you never know who would be watching. He was prepared for detectives, but not for the man who confronted him when he had gone

only a few steps. Donald Morgan had never entered into his calculations; therefore, although it annoyed him to be stopped, he was not particularly concerned when Donald laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Take a little ride with me, Val," Donald urged. Val looked him up and down sneeringly, refusing to give in to the apprehension that snatched at him. Donald was thinner than he had been when they last met, and the determination that had driven him since then had given his face a gaunt, strained look. Trouble had stripped his character to the bone, revealing all its strength.

"Why should I ride with a man who looks like a tramp?" Val demanded, trying to jerk away from Donald's detaining hand.

"Oh, you might be interested when the man looks like a tramp because he's been riding down from Lenox in an open car," Donald retorted airily, with a glance at his dusty clothing.

Half an hour earlier that remark would not have bothered Val, but now, with two diamond necklaces, each worth a fortune, in his pocket, he was in no mood to kick up a fuss and lay himself open to further questioning from the astute man who was known as one of the best district attorneys New York had ever had. Lenox! Steve Chamberlin's widow was living there now. And Donald had been talking to her, eh? Well, a bluff might work.

"What's it to me where you've been?" Val snapped back, still trying to jerk himself free. "Take your hands off me," he added sharply. "Take your hands off me or I'll call a cop."

That, Donald knew, was sheer bluff, a stall for time. And as soon as he had spoken Val knew that Donald knew it. For calling a cop was the last thing he would have done under any circumstances.

"Sure," Donald agreed. "Call a cop. You'll need one when I get through with you. I owe you a good polishing off, and I'm going to give it to you now just for luck."

Donald had reached the point where he had to strike out at something or somebody. His trip to Lenox had been in vain; he had seen Mrs. Chamberlin, after much effort and a great deal of bribing of servants, and heard exactly the tale she had told ever since her husband's death. That hunch was wrong, then.

His nerves had reached the breaking point. The very thought of beating up this sheik was exhilarating. He cast a quick glance through the block, which was in a residential section, and therefore quiet. Not a soul was in sight to interfere.

But he was taking no chance on Val's having a knife this time. He decided to frisk him first. Rapidly he ran his hands over Val's clothing, and they came in contact almost at once with the larger of the two jewel cases.

"Ye-es?" he drawled, his mind instantly flashing back to the missing necklace that had figured in the Chamberlin case. In that moment, too, Val realized in a burst of fear that he was cornered. He, too, had reached the place where he could stand no more.

"I didn't steal 'em," he gasped, the last atom of his courage suddenly oozing away. "Honestly, I didn't have a thing to do with it." In the flash of a second he had become a craven thing, cringing and whining as if he had been beaten.

Donald was as cold and hard as the diamonds which he held in his hand. He did not know quite what had happened, but was certain that he had stumbled on a solution of the whole mystery of Steve Chamberlin's death.

"You're going with me," he announced calmly. From the first he had gripped Val with one hand, despite his squirmings; now he doubled that grip.

"Oh, please don't turn me in," Ricardo babbled. "Don't turn me in. Listen—I know who shot Steve Chamberlin—I'll make a written confession of all I know if you'll keep still about the necklaces, and I'll split with you on them—you can take one, or I'll sell the two and give you half the money. Listen—"

"Oh, shut up and come along," Donald cut in harshly. He dragged Val across the sidewalk and whistled to a taxi driver who was cruising along the nearest cross street. The driver eyed the two men shrewdly, noted Donald's grasp of Val's arm, and raised his eyebrows at the address Donald gave him.

"D. A.'s office?" he asked, grinning.

"Yes, and make it snappy," Donald answered. "Light a cigarette for me before we start, too, will you? I've got my hands full."

"I'll say you have, bo," the driver agreed. "Say, what ya think—last night as

I was coming across Fifty-Second, a cop jumps on the running board and says—"

All the way down town he regaled them with tales of his experiences with the law, while Val Ricardo sat morosely in his corner, his eyes narrowed, scheming to get out of this latest tight corner into which fate had thrust him.

Donald, too, was planning. "He always slips out somehow," one of the district attorney's men had told him, speaking of Val. Well, this time the rat was caught!

Events happened with meteoric suddenness after they reached the district attorney's office. Faced with prison and worse, Val showed his true colors in a complete breakdown and told everything he knew.

Corroboration came almost at once. The district attorney's chief detective had gone that morning to Lenox, and, after he had been communicated with by phone, he forced Mrs. Chamberlin to throw off her mask and admit everything, hiding behind the "unwritten law" for protection.

She told of Val Ricardo's visit to her immediately after his dismissal by Cecile. He had said there was a woman in the case, a woman with whom Chamberlin was madly in love, and had shown her the letter he had stolen as he left Cecile's dressing room the night of the murder.

She had followed her husband as he made his way downstairs with the necklace, had watched as he crossed the street to the automobile and gave it to Cecile; then, when once again he reached the door, she had killed him, loathing him for his infidelity to her and to their children.

Rapidly as events moved, their progress was too slow for Donald; he could not wait until Norma and he could be alone together. She was brought to the district attorney's office to clear up a point in Val's testimony, and when she had given it, she sank down on the arm of Donald's chair, snuggling in the shelter of his protecting arm. Certainly she needed it. Like a flower caught in a gale, she looked on as the prosecutor doomed Ricardo.

"You're to get out of New York and stay out," he announced. "I'm giving you till nine o'clock to-morrow morning to be gone. By that time you can pack up and wind up your affairs. If you ever show your face on Broadway I'll see to it that you go straight to Sing Sing.

"You've been getting away with murder

for years now, but you've reached the end of your rope. I'd send you to jail now, but I want to protect that silly young woman from whom you lifted this necklace. A detective will stay with you till you get out of the State, and he'll see that you get out fast. Now—on your way!"

Utterly defeated, Val slunk out of the office. He was being sent to a doom that was worse than prison to him, for he was being exiled from the Broadway he loved better than any other place on earth.

He knew that the game was up, that it was futile to argue or to plead. For a few moments he stood outside the door, his shoulders drooping, too forlorn to think.

"Aw, buck up!" urged the detective at his side. "You're getting off easy."

Still Val hesitated. Then his mind began to function again. He could lay low for awhile and then come back when everything had blown over. Sure! The very thought demonstrated his ignorance of the district attorney, but Val was never able to see beneath the surface.

"Well, I've always wanted to see Paris," he announced nonchalantly.

On the way to the elevator he tried to lift the detective's watch. His failure, and the way the good-natured officer razzed him for trying in no way perturbed him.

"It isn't a very good watch anyway," Val commented jauntily.

As he had left the office Norma Barry looked after Ricardo sympathetically. She realized now that he was bad clear through, and that he had been deceiving her with his postures and his tales of prowess, but somehow, now that he was being shown up, she could not bring herself to condemn him absolutely. He was the victim of environment. She was brought back to herself as an arm tightened about her.

"A penny for your thoughts," Donald remarked, and grinned in acknowledgment of his own lack of originality. Norma would not have cared what he said; the very sound of his voice was music.

"Oh, honey!" she murmured.

"Feel strong enough to write your name?" he asked as he lifted her up.

"Why—why, yes," she answered wonderingly.

"Say, brother!" Donald Morgan said as he caught the arm of one of the D. A.'s men. "I'm a stranger in your town; where's the marriage license bureau?"

THE END



# The Way of a Witness

A TICKFALL STORY WHICH SHOWS WHAT LAMENTABLE DISCOURAGEMENTS AN ENTERPRISING COLORED MAN MAY MEET IN THE PURSUIT OF EASY MONEY

By E. K. Means

IT was high noon of the first day of Mike Mule's return to Tickfall, and he was sitting under a shrub across the street from the Gaitskill home, waiting for something to turn up. This was far from Mike's usual haunts, and far from that section of Tickfall where the colored people congregated; but Mike was tired of being dunned by his creditors. He owed money to everybody of color he knew, and he knew everybody of color in the village; so he had stepped beyond the confines of the colored district in order to get a chance to rest and think undisturbed.

Mike had just been released from the alcoholic ward of a State hospital, and the authorities had given him a ticket to Tickfall. Once more he had come to the end of his resources, and he sat there blaming his luck for all the things that had gone wrong. When things went right, he always took the credit to himself. Even now, as he sat and pondered, fate and circumstance were working together to revive his interest in life and to inspire his hope of making some easy money.

Silk Curtain, son of Pap Curtain, the Tickfall gravedigger, and of Pap's fourth wife, was quite a horseman. He maintained a "stable," which was a reminder of the boyhood experience of many American citizens. His horses were stick horses. He chose a stalk of ironweed when he could find it, for its bushy, flowered top made a showy tail when he got astride of it and went galloping down the road. Besides, the tail stirred up a gratifying dust, and left the impression that Silk was riding a fast one. The longer the ironweed, the faster and finer the horse.

A young rival in the field of horsemanship went to the swamp and cut some long,

flexible bamboo canes, twenty feet in length. He rode one of these "fish poles," as he called them, to town, carrying the others on his shoulder. He argued that these were better horses than Silk possessed; but it was demonstrated that the bamboo steeds went down the road without stirring up any more dust than a snake.

"An' all real good saddle hosses," declared Silk, "kicks up de dus'. Dey trabbles close to de groun' an' kinder shuffles along, an' dat makes 'em ride easy. You got to watch 'em, too, or dey'll fall down wid you."

On this particular day, while riding his favorite saddle horse, Silk met with an accident for which his sister Velvet was largely to blame. The mother of these children worked for Colonel Tom Gaitskill, and both were on their way to the Gaitskill home at mealtime, to "git some of mammy's good cookin'." The seven-year-old Silk was galloping up the hill on his fastest horse. His eighteen-year-old sister, as slender and straight and graceful as a stalk of sugar cane, was walking sedately along the sidewalk, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

It was the noon hour, when the inhabitants of Tickfall are always busy eating. There were just four people on the street that led up the hill to where the colonel's large white house stood, surrounded by an iron fence.

A colored man named Lige Prophet drove up the hill at a lively speed, riding in a flashy flivver. He should have watched where he was going, but under the circumstances that appeared to be impossible. He saw the slender black girl who represented his ideal of Ethiopian beauty, and who was the saint of his deepest devotion. It was

perfectly proper for him to look at her as he advanced, perfectly natural for him to turn his head to gaze at her as he was passing, and unavoidable that he should look backward at her after he had passed. At the same time, he ought to have watched where he was going; but he did not, and that was how it happened.

Silk was crossing the street directly in the path of the oncoming flivver. He managed to run clear of the machine with his own body, but its front wheel ran over the tail of his horse. Just for a second it arrested his progress, bringing him up with a jerk. Then, the wheel having rolled over the tail of his steed, the rider was suddenly released and shot forward as an arrow is shot from a bow.

Silk struck the Gaitskill fence, first with the head of his horse, and then with his own head. His open, panting mouth came in contact with an iron picket, the blood spurted, and Silk's front tooth became what he called a "wabbler" in his dental equipment.

Howls and shrieks and objurgations and supplications! Then suddenly Mike Mule sprang from the shrubbery across the road, leaped over the fence like a hound dog, ran to Silk, and seized him by the arm.

"Bless Gawd!" he bawled. "Dat auto is hit you an' mighty nigh kilt you, an' I seen it all! Yes, little nigger boy, Mike Mule seen it all!"

"Who? Me?" Silk howled. "Naw! It warn't no auto whut hit me. I fell ag'in' dat fence an' busted a tooth out!"

"Hush, you little debbil!" Mike Mule snapped. "You ain't know whut happened, because you is too young to notice. I seen it all!"

He cupped his hand over the boy's bleeding mouth, caught a generous supply of the gore, and smeared it over Silk's forehead and the back of his neck.

"Murder! He'p! Commere eve'y-body!" Mike Mule shrieked, as he gave Silk a violent push which tossed him in a heap in the middle of the street.

Lige Prophet had slowed down at the top of the hill, because the girl behind him was drawing him as a magnet draws the steel. Hearing shouts behind him, he turned his head to see if the girl he adored was calling him. He beheld a boy lying in the middle of the street, on the very spot where his car had passed a moment before. He recognized Mike Mule, who

bent solicitously over the wailing youth, and who was wiping the lad's forehead.

Lige leaped out of the car and ran back.

"Whut ails him?" Lige asked in fearful tones. "Did I run into him?"

"Dis here is yo' job," Mike announced in a tone of great satisfaction. "You done busted a teeth, fractioned de skull of his head, an' messed up his insides!"

"Lawdymussy!" Lige exclaimed. "I'll turn de flivver aroun' an' tote him to a doctor in a hurry!"

"Huh! You better git away befo' dey gits you in jail fer reckless drivin'," Mike Mule warned him. "Ain't you got sense enough to run when you kin go ahead? Hop it, you blame fool! Scat!"

And because Lige was young and innocent, and didn't know any better, he took the advice of the most disreputable man in Tickfall, and fled.

By this time Velvet Curtain had come to the top of the hill, and she added her shrieks to the wailing of Silk and the braying of Mike Mule. Mammy Curtain came running from the rear of the house, calling upon her Maker, and demanding to know who had killed her darling child. Silk opened his capacious mouth, "wabbled" his tooth with his tongue, and yowled like a catamount.

Mammy Curtain spun around like a whirling dervish and rent the air with her shrieks and imprecations.

"I know who done it," Mike Mule said. "I seen it all. When you craves to collect damages, I'm yo' witness. Dis here axidant is wuth a lot of money, an' de feller who done it jes' went right on—hit an' run!"

## II

MAMMY escorted Silk down the hill to the office of a dentist. The dentist was fat, bald-headed, and hot, and was easily disgusted with the bawling pickaninny.

"Aw, shut up!" he howled. "How in Sam Hill can I pull your tooth when you make so much racket you skeer me away? Hush! If you don't git still, I'll make a mistake and pull your yowling head off!"

"Yee-ow! Don't pull it! I needs it to chaw wid!" Silk wailed.

"That's your first tooth. You'll get another one. It 'll grow back," the dentist whooped to be heard above Silk's howl. "Shut up! Hush!"

"It won't grow back by dinnertime!" Silk bawled.

There was a good deal more of this, but finally the dentist held the little incisor, grasped in the forceps, above Silk's head.

"What you want me to do with it?" the dentist asked. "Give it to you, or drop it through the knot hole in the floor?"

Then, to divert the boy's mind from his trouble, the dentist pointed to a large hole in the floor beside the dental chair.

"See that hole, Silk? That's a most convenient arrangement. This room was once a barber shop, and when the barber cut off people's hair he would sweep it down that hole. I bet the ground under this house is knee-deep in hair! Then a doctor rented this room for his office, and whenever he cut off a finger, or a toe, or a ear, he dropped it down that hole. I'll bet there's a million fingers and toes on the ground under this house! And now I've had my dental office here for ten years, and when I pull a tooth I drop it down that hole. There's about forty bushels of teeth under this house. Toes and fingers, hair and teeth, more parts of folks under this house than there is in the graveyard!"

This appalling statement diverted Silk's attention from his accident, and he forgot to whimper. He climbed from the chair, showing the whites of his eyes, and evincing a desire to get away from that hole in the floor.

"Shuffle on down to de Henscratch an' show yo' tooth to yo' paw, honey," his mother suggested.

Silk shuffled. As he drew near to the Henscratch, however, he began to mourn his loss afresh. In times past, when he had hurt himself, his father had given him a nickel to stop howling. He decided to try for a financial profit once more.

Whooping like a maniac, he entered the Henscratch, where the Big Four of Tick-fall sat in solemn council.

"My good gawsh!" shouted the Rev. Vinegar Atts, springing to his feet, overturning his chair, and knocking his precious stovepipe hat off the table to the dusty floor. "What ails you now?"

Silk drew near and opened his mouth, revealing a cavity in front. Then he opened his hand and showed his tooth; after which he howled some more.

"How come?" Pap Curtain whooped.

"Fell ag'in' a iron gate an' knocked it out!" Silk shrieked.

"Aw, stop howlin'!" Pap Curtain urged. "It 'll grow agin. Dat's yo' baby milk tooth."

"I needs dat tooth to bite my vittles wid de nex' time I git somepin to eat!" Silk howled. "Now I got to be a gummer on dat side fer I don't know how long!"

"Don't bawl so loud!" Figger Bush squalled. "My Lawd, you make as much racket as ef you done lost yo' whole jaw-bone. Git still!"

"Here, le's take up a collection fer dis po' unforchnit pickaninny," Vinegar Atts suggested, as he laid a copper cent upon the table. "Gimme yo' contributions, please!"

Figger and Skeeter gave a penny each, and Pap Curtain added his little bit.

"I'll gib two pennies," he said magnanimously, "because I's de po' unforchnit cullud daddy of dis po' unforchnit idjit chile."

"Now, sonny, git still!" Skeeter commanded, as he swept the coins together and placed them in Silk's palm, beside the tooth. "You see, dis here is a lucky tooth. It done made you rich!"

### III

SILK walked away from the Henscratch, invested his money in a confection called an "all-day sucker," and was comforted. He did not have to bite or chew this delicacy, so he did not miss his tooth.

Then he began to reason. If one tooth was lucky, more teeth would be luckier, and the dentist had told him where he could find bushels of teeth. If one tooth brought five cents, a bushel of teeth would make him rich beyond the dreams of avarice. He would have as much money as a bank.

At this point in his cogitations, a youthful chum named Sermon Atts came up and began to interview him.

"Whar did you git dat sucker?" he asked.

"Bought it wid lucky tooth money," Silk told him.

As young Curtain opened his mouth to speak, Sermon stared at the excavation.

"How did you bust yo' tooth out?" he inquired.

"Fell ag'in' a iron fence. Don't keer much. Fo' fellers gimme money. Dis here is a lucky tooth," said Silk, opening his hand that Sermon might inspect it as it lay upon his black palm.

"Gosh! I wish I had a lucky tooth," Sermon remarked.

"I know whar we kin git bushels of 'em," Silk answered.

They started for the place, and thus it happened that Silk could not be found when Pap Curtain much desired to locate his wandering son.

Silk had hardly gone from the Hen-scratch, comforted and cured with his five pennies, when Mike Mule entered the emporium and invited himself to a seat with the Big Four. He turned to Pap Curtain and asked:

"How much damage does you aim to colleck?"

"Damage?" Pap Curtain inquired. "Whut fer?"

"Ain't yo' son Silk hurted? Ain't he damaged?" Mike demanded.

"Naw! Got a tooth bust out," Pap replied.

"It ain't so," Mike Mule asserted. "Dat little coon wus hurted bad. I'm suprised he's livin' yit. You ain't examinated yo' son good. He wus knocked down by a auto an' lef' fer dead in de middle of de street. De nigger who damaged him hit him an' run, an' it's lucky I wus right dar to see it, because you kin colleck big damage from a coon whut's able to pay."

"Huh!" Pap Curtain grunted, meditating upon the possibilities of the case.

"You tote dat boy home an' put him in bed, an' wrop things aroun' him, an' tell eve'ybody you see dat he's mighty nigh kilt an' is got ailin' pains all over him," Mike advised.

"Muss I send fer a doctor?" Pap asked.

"Good Lawd, naw! Not no doctor a-tall!" Mike answered.

"Should I oughter see a lawyer?" Pap inquired.

"Oh, my gosh!" Mike exclaimed. "I never see such a stupid nigger as you is! Whut you wanta git de white folks mixed up in dis fer? Dey'll jes' mess it up!"

"How much damage you think I oughter git?" Pap asked.

"Lige Prophet wus de man whut done de damage. He made five hundred dollars on his cotton crap dis year, an' dey tells me he's cravin' to git married. He kin pay easy, an' I'll make a dern good witness," said Mike. "In fack, I am de onliest witness whut is."

"I kin use fifty dollars easy," Pap Curtain said thoughtfully. "I needs it bad!"

"Fifty is about right fer you," Mike said. "Of co'se, I gits a little fer bein' de witness."

Skeeter Butts, who prided himself upon being a good business man, now leaned back in his chair, put his feet on the table, and looked at Mike Mule with the shrewd eyes of a trader.

"You's willin' to swear dat Lige wusn't lookin' whar he wus gwine, an' he run over dat he'pless infunt chile an' hurt him dreadful? Dat makes a good case; but whut I wants to know is, whar do you come in? How much does you expect to git?"

"I am de nigger witness who seen it all," Mike grinned. "I ought to come in pretty good on de money. I'll make a powerful good witness, because eve'ybody knows dat cullud pussions don't testify ag'in' each yuther. Eve'ything depends on whut I say, an' whut I say depends on whut I git an' how much."

"How much does you want?" Pap Curtain inquired.

"How much does you offer me?" Mike countered.

"One-fourth," Pap suggested.

"Naw!" Mike Mule snapped. "'Tain't enough. You cain't git nothin' widout me. I demands at least one-sixth!"

Pap pondered this curious arithmetic for a long time. Then he said:

"You ain't such a awful good witness, Mike. You has been in de lunatic asylum recent, ain't you?"

"Shore!" Mike said. "I jes' got loose from de asylum; but I warn't no lunatic. De only trouble wus dat my mind wusn't right. I got to drinkin' dis here new-style licker, an' I got to seein' things wrong in my mind. I would see a man wid a head like a mule, or a dawg wid a head like a man, an' it shore bothered my mind. Eve' thing I seen looked kinder crooked."

"I expect eve' thing about you is crooked, Mike," Pap said; "but I will make you dis trade—ef you won't accept one-fourth, I will try to colleck sixty dollars damage an' pay you one-sixth. Dat will be ten dollars fer you an' fifty dollars fer me."

"I won't accept no less dan one-sixth," Mike said stubbornly. "An' now I advices you to hunt up yo' pickaninny an' keep him in de house, sufferin' from his injuries, until we colleck our damage from Lige fer his reckless drivin'."



Pap Curtain started in search of his son, but could not find him. Nobody had seen Silk. He and Sermon Atts were having the time of their lives under the floor of the dental office.

Each had assembled a hatful of teeth, which they planned to sell to their friends for one cent a tooth. They were not sure there would be a market for their wares, but they hoped to create one. They resolved that when five molars were sold they would take the five cents thus acquired and visit a candy store where certain confections were sold "six for a nickel." The distribution of the profits would be equitable, it would be accomplished without difficulty, and everybody would be in luck. Oh, the imagination of childhood! The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.

Then the boys became ambitious, and began to conduct some interesting experiments. They found a place where builders were constructing a gasoline station, and discovered a barrel of tar. They "swiped" several handfuls of the tar and attempted to construct necklaces of teeth, attaching the molars to a string with the tar. They found that their hot little hands melted the tar, so that the teeth dropped off, but they overcame this difficulty by keeping the necklaces in a tin can full of cold water. They agreed that they would take them out and sell them quickly—let the buyer beware!

Such dreams of big business were sufficient to keep them busy and happy for several hours. Silk came home about dark, when the chickens were going to roost. Pap laid hold upon him with great solicitude, and saw that he had plenty to eat and was put to bed at once.

Up to that time Pap Curtain had often declared to the whole world that his no-account son was not worth a cent to anybody. Now Silk was worth sixty dollars, and Pap was grooming him just as a stable boy grooms a race horse, and for the same purpose—to get the money.

#### IV

MIKE MULE visited Pap Curtain's cabin, to keep his eyes upon this prospect of acquiring easy money. He knocked upon the door, which was opened by Pap's daughter, Velvet. Mike found Pap sitting at a table, trying to master the vagaries of some "educated" dice. Through the open

door he could see Silk playing happily with Sermon Atts.

"Whut you mean by leavin' dat pickaninny exposed so keerless?" Mike demanded. "Suspose dat Lige Prophet nigger or his daddy come ramblin' in here an' see dat nigger boy lookin' so healthy an' spry, whut sort of claim kin you set up fer damages?"

"I'm watchin' my bizness," Pap Curtain snapped. "I keeps a eye out todes de front an' de back, too. My little gal is he'pin' me watch, an' nothin' gits by her bright eyes. She takes one look an' spots a nigger fer jes' whut he is, an' no mo'. When she seed you comin', I axed her whut you looked like, an' she said you looked like somepin whut had been buried about fo' days an' de dawgs done dug you up."

"Whut is you-all tryin' to do to Lige?" Velvet wanted to know. "He ain't done nothin' to Silk. Dat little debbil ain't hurt a bit, an' dis looks to me like some kind of skin game."

"Dat is whut it is, honey," Pap told her. "I sees a good chance of skeerin' sixty dollars out'n a country nigger boy who ain't never done nobody no harm, but who's flush wid money. He's got mo' money dan is good fer him, an' I figger I am doin' him a favor to deduck a few change from his pusson an' spend it fer him."

"A po' cullud man is got to look out fer hisself, Velvet," Mike Mule told her. "Ef I cain't make money no yuther way, I will hab to wuck fer it, an' dat's de poorest way I knows to git money. I gits ten dollars out'n dis deal, an' I needs de dough."

"But Lige ain't done nothin', an' 'tain't fair to make him pay," Velvet protested.

"Hush objectin' objections, honey," Mike replied. "Ef yo' paw stays wid me in dis deal, he'll be able to buy you somepin to eat fer many days to come."

"De hardest job I has now is to keep dat little nigger boy suppressed proper until we kin collect up," Pap complained, as he continued to roll the dice and gather them in his hand again with the facile gesture of long practice. "You see, he craves to go out an' play. I've hired dat little Sermon Atts to stay an' play wid him, but after awhile Sermon will be goin' along todes home, an' den who's gwine to amuse dis brat?"

"He needs a dawg to monkey wid," Mike Mule suggested after a moment's

thought. "De dawg won't hab to go home an' repote to his pap. He kin stay all night an' sleep in de same bed wid Silk."

"Ain't got no dawg," Pap muttered.

"Mebbe I kin git you one," Mike said as he rose to his feet.

"You better git him quick," Pap said. "I got to keep dis boy in de house an' be ready to roll him into bed ef anybody calls to see him. Bein' in bed will prove how bad hurt he is."

"Skeeter Butts is got a dawg," Mike muttered thoughtfully. "I mought borry dat ole houn' unbeknownst to Skeeter."

"Dat's a good notion," Pap agreed. "Dat ole houn' is safe—ain't got no teeth to bite my baby boy wid."

"An' yo' baby boy is shawt a front tooth an' cain't bite de houn'," Mike grinned. "Dat makes it safe fer bofe of 'em; but dar's one little matter dat I desires to mention befo' I goes atter de houn'."

"Whut's dat?" Pap asked sharply.

"My mouth ain't chawed no vittles today, an' I feels 'most too feeble in my stomick to go out an' do you any mo' favors dan I is already bestowed."

Pap reached into his pocket, brought out a quarter dollar, and slapped it upon the table with a vicious stroke.

"Go steal dat dawg an' fotch him here," he said, "an' I will pay you dis two bits. I hopes de grub you buy wid it will choke you to death!"

A short time after Mike left, there was another knock upon the door.

"Go see who dat coon is," Pap Curtain snarled. "I'm got so many interruptions I never will git to learn de hang of dese loaded dices!"

Velvet walked to the window, the glass of which was opaque with accumulated dust and dirt, and peered out at the man standing on the porch.

"It's Lige Prophet," she giggled. "He's all fixed up like he wus fixed to go to a weddin'!"

Pap Curtain rose with alacrity and skipped into the next room, closing the door, through which Lige might have caught a vision of the happy, healthy boy.

"Tell him dat Silk is in bed wid ter'ble misery in his back, an' cain't see nobody," Pap told her.

Then he listened at a crack in the door while Velvet received the caller and delivered the message.

"Dat sho' is awful!" Lige said. "I hope he won't haul off an' die on me! You figger I'm in dat danger?"

"I dunno," Velvet said, and her eye contracted into something resembling a wink. "Pap says you done Silk sixty dollars' wuth of damage up to now, an' ef he do die I know it will cost you a whole heap mo'. Fust-class fun'erals is expenshious, an' us don't want no cheap lay-out fer Silk."

"Kin I do anything to he'p you-all?" Lige asked.

"Naw, suh! We don't know whut to do ourselfs," Velvet told him.

Pap Curtain was sitting on the floor, furiously smoking his corncob pipe, and he nodded his head at this with vast approval. His girl was certainly smart!

It was well that he could not see the young couple. Velvet had her head on Lige's shoulder, and Lige had both arms around her.

The girl accompanied him to the door and through the door. They closed the door noisily behind them.

Then Pap heard a quiet knocking in the rear, and found Mike Mule with the dog. Mike was holding out his hand.

"Gimme dem two bits you promised me!" he said.

## V

UNDERNEATH the floor of the dental office Silk Curtain and Sermon Atts had found several discarded sets of false teeth. They were not complete sets. In some a tooth was missing, in others the plate was cracked; but still they were most interesting and satisfactory playthings, and all the afternoon the boys had been wondering what use could best be made of them. They had fashioned necklaces until they had exhausted their supply of tar and loose teeth, and now they were debating whether to break up the plates and use the material, or to do something else with what they had.

The arrival of the dog as a new amusement diverted their attention. They were glad to have old Rover, for he was a familiar friend.

This hound belonged to Skeeter Butts, and was almost as old as Skeeter himself. For many years it had been an object of amusement to Skeeter's friends. It was an old, half blind, crippled, mangy canine, limping with first one foot and then the other, forgetful as to which leg was crip-

pled; but Skeeter took the best of care of his superannuated pet, declaring that the animal had "raised him," and that this imposed an obligation on his part to care for it as long as it lived.

Among other deficiencies the old hound was toothless, and Skeeter had to feed it what he called "spoon vittles." This fact gave Silk and Sermon an idea, and they set themselves solemnly to the task of attempting to adjust a set of false teeth to the dog's mouth.

Opening the animal's mouth with their fingers, they placed the upper plate where it belonged and tied it with a piece of cord to the upper part of the dog's head.

Nothing funnier was ever seen in Tick-fall than the appearance of that canine when they had gone just that far in their undertaking; but when they had also inserted a lower plate, and had tied it in place by wrapping a cord around the dog's chin—oh, it was a scream!

The superannuated canine, accustomed to all sorts of treatment from the children who played with him, was not disturbed by this operation, because he was not hurt. He lay upon the floor, his lips curled back, the terrible teeth exposed in a ludicrous grin. The two colored boys rolled on the floor in agonized mirth. They slapped their legs and held their sides and made the cabin echo with their hilarious screams.

When the old dog got up, walked from one to the other of the prostrate boys, and gazed at them with purblind eyes of solemn inquiry and a toothful mouth agrin with humorless distortion—oh, then they were shrieking maniacs of uncontrollable mirth, beating their breasts in frenzy, and begging the dog to go away and hide himself before they laughed themselves to death.

After awhile the dog found his dental equipment uncomfortable. He sat down upon his haunches and tried to shake the teeth out of his mouth by a rapid vibration of his head. To the interested witnesses, there seemed to be a ring, a sort of halo of human teeth, surrounding the dog's head—an enamel circle of incisors, cuspids, bicuspid, and molars, whirling around and around.

"Oh, my Gawd!" Silk Curtain shrieked. "I done laughed my stomick loose from my backbone spinal colyum! Come an' save me from dis here funny dawg!"

Failing to shake the teeth out, the dog

undertook to claw them from his jaws; but his toe nails had long since been worn off, and the boys had tied the cord firmly. The poor beast slapped his face with his right paw and then shifted to his left, but he still maintained his grin.

"Holy Marster!" Sermon Atts shrieked, as the animal fanned the sides of his face with his front feet. "He's got a new set of teeth, and now he's rehearsin' his gestures so he kin learn to play on a juice harp!"

Having failed to claw off the teeth, the animal undertook to dislodge them by scraping the sides of his head upon the floor.

"Lawdymussy, look at him!" Silk Curtain howled, holding his sides and pounding the floor with his heels in what had now become an agony of hysterical mirth. "Dat fool dawg is gittin' gymnastic in his ole age, tryin' to slide on his year!"

Over and over the dog turned, while the boys shrieked with mirth and wailed because their laughter hurt them. Then, for the first time, the dog became frightened. He opened his mouth and howled and showed the youngsters just how many teeth he had. It was an appalling exhibition. It seemed to them that Rover had cornered within his own jaws all the teeth in the world. Then he began to work his jaws, snapping them with a speed and violence never before achieved in the canine kingdom, and how they clattered and clicked!

"Oh, Moses!" Silk Curtain howled. "Listen to him rattle dem bones! Gib him a chaw of terbacker, an' le's see kin he spit wid dem new teeth!"

The boys could endure the fun no longer. It was time for Rover to go away from there before they laughed themselves to death. Sermon Atts opened the door, and Skeeter's hound started for the Henscratch, two blocks away, at a greater speed than his old bones had manifested for many a day.

The dog came through the back door of the Henscratch just as Mike Mule, having eaten at the Shin Bone Restaurant, entered by the front door. The hound and the man met in the middle of the floor, and Rover raised his front paws up on Mike's chest in a mute appeal for help and general relief.

Mike had recently been released from the hospital for the insane, where he had

been incarcerated for "seeing things"—a man with a dog's head, for instance. He realized that his old mental trouble had come back. He had suffered a relapse—he was seeing a dog with a man's teeth!

Mike Mule did not laugh—he fainted.

There was presented another scene without previous parallel in Tickfall—the Big Four sitting at a table, their slow minds unable to grasp the situation, wondering what it was all about; Mike Mule sprawled out in a dead faint upon the floor; two little colored boys, who had followed the dog to get their teeth back when the dog was through with them, standing in the doorway with a frightened grin upon their faces; and a dog in the middle of the group, "chawin' like mad," and uttering whimpers of discomfort which grew at last to a howl of pure fright.

Finally Rover chewed the cord in two, ejected his dental annoyance, and went whining down the street.

"My Lawd!" Vinegar Atts exclaimed, springing to his feet in alarm. "Ole Mike Mule is done collapsed down an' died on us!"

The four men lifted Mike and carried him to a pool table. There they stretched him out and poured water on his head and corn-shuck liquor down his throat. When he was restored to consciousness, he looked at Pap Curtain with frightened eyes and said:

"Pap, dis is my las' message befo' I goes to meet my Maker. All I tole you about Lige Prophet bumpin' yo' little boy wid a auto wus a lie!"

## VI

WHAT Mike Mule thought was his dying message was merely a mistake. Within five minutes he had been fully restored to normal health, had been laughed at, "cussed out," and evicted from the Henscratch, with a warning not to return. His hope of making easy money with a glib tongue, an accommodating memory, and a flexible conscience had vanished.

He sat down on a stump under a shade tree and pondered deeply over the matter. The more he pondered, the more alluring grew the small remaining prospect of securing a small amount of cash.

"I'm gwine take my foots in my hands an' hoof it out to Mustard Prophet's house," he announced to himself.

Two hours later he had completed the journey and was sitting with Mustard on the steps of the latter's front porch, six miles from Tickfall.

"I come to see you about de trouble yo' son got into wid his auto, Mustard," Mike began. "Pap Curtain's got a powerful strong case ag'in' yo' boy. It will cost about sixty dollars of Lige's hard-earned dollars. I am de only witness, an' I gits ten dollars fer seein' whut I seen."

"Bad luck!" Mustard sighed.

"Now I am got two kinds of good memory," Mike continued. "One is fer a feller an' one is ag'in' a feller, an' I feels jes' now like my memory ag'in' yo' boy ain't as good as it use to be. Mebbe de auto didn't hurt Silk as much as Pap hopes it did. Mebbe fer ten dollars I could remember some things dat Pap would gib me ten dollars to fergit. Mebbe I kin rickollect dat Silk fell ag'in' de fence an' bust out a tooth, an' dat wus all de damage did. Now whut I axes you is dis—kin you an' me make a trade? Does you crave to talk bizness wid me?"

"Naw!" Mustard replied sharply. "You is a liar! You don't git a cent out'n me ner out'n my boy, an' Pap don't neither; an' ef you mentions yo' bizness any mo', I'll sick de houn' dawgs on you!"

With bitterness in his heart, Mike rose to go. When he turned he saw Lige Prophet and Velvet Curtain. They had slipped out upon the porch and seated themselves upon a bench. They had heard his speech, and were laughing at him.

The girl spoke:

"When you go back to town, Mike, please hunt up Pap Curtain an' tell him me an' Lige is done got married!"

## RIDDLE

GRIM, sorrowed, gay; to myriad musings prey;

Cowled, evil; hating, loving; cruel, kind;

Who shall interpret that which gods one day

Flung to the fates and man, and dubbed it mind?

Olin Lyman



# The Satellite

CHARLIE WALLIS HAD PLAYED SECOND FIDDLE TO HIS BRILLIANT BROTHER SO LONG THAT IT WAS RATHER A SURPRISE WHEN TWO WOMEN, AT LEAST, DECIDED THAT HE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF A MAN

By Elizabeth Jordan

**K**INGSHILL, which was their home town, knew the boys as the Wallis twins, Ed and Charlie; but in their infancy few save the twins' mother could distinguish Ed from Charlie. As they grew older, however, while they remained identical in appearance, the most casual observer could have told the twins apart.

Even at the tender age of four or five Ed Wallis was a roistering young male, self-assured, masterful, and with a compelling eye for pretty little girls. Charlie was his exact opposite. Physically he was as big and strong as Ed, but his blue eyes beamed mildness, he backed shyly away from strangers, and he fled from admiring little girls like a startled faun. If these tendencies had been ignored, he would have outgrown them; but they were discussed and ridiculed in his presence, and the result was inevitable. Charlie Wallis grew from a shy, self-distrustful boy into a shy, self-distrustful youth and then into a shy, self-distrustful man.

"I'm Eddie's brother," he had boasted in his infancy, and Eddie's brother he remained.

Ed dominated him absolutely; but Ed dominated every one. Charlie, whose brain was rather better than his brother's, never suspected the fact, but followed humbly in his twin's wake, admiring him and passionately longing for the qualities that he himself lacked.

"I'm just a satellite," he remarked to Ed in a rare moment of bitterness.

Ed, being in high good humor at the moment, responded:

"Oh, you can't be that, for you're half of me!"

Charlie was touched, even though later, when *not* in good humor, Ed sometimes reminded him of his early estimate of himself.

"Pretty good—for a satellite," Ed would say.

By this time Edward Wallis was the most popular young man in his county, and one of the most successful. Friends of the twins said he dragged Charlie onward and upward by the force of his individual assertiveness. Certainly he and Charlie were never apart. They went through college together, studied law together, passed their bar examinations together, and entered their profession as partners.

They made a rather good thing of it. Charlie, the satellite, worked up their cases in the office with painstaking thoroughness, and Ed handled them in court with a mixture of humor, cajolery, and common sense that daily increased his popularity.

Their tastes being similar, both young men fell in love with the same girl, and Ed married her after a characteristically tempestuous wooing which swept her off her feet. She had no suspicions of the nature of Charlie's feeling for her. Ed had, but he shared her surprise when Charlie refused to make his home with them. They argued, but Charlie's decision was firm.

"I'll stick to our old bachelor quarters," he said. "They're only a few blocks from your new home, and I'll dine with you Sundays, if urged."

He enjoyed those Sunday dinners. There were always other guests, too, for at first Ed's bride seemed as gay and companionable as her husband was. Every one else

talked so much that Charlie didn't have to talk at all—which suited him perfectly. He sat and listened with serene eyes and his shy, boyish smile.

"He's a pretty heavy weight to carry socially," Ed told his wife; "but put him next to some girl who talks all the time, and she may not notice it."

Honoré Wallis nodded and sighed. She liked Charlie, but she also felt sorry for him. He was a bit of a burden on occasions; and at all times, of course, he was wholly eclipsed by his brilliant brother. She felt a certain contempt for his dependence on Ed. She was increasingly glad that he did not live in her house. He would have been a care.

Charlie experienced no pangs at the sight of Ed's happiness. When the girl he loved became his brother's bride, he simply ceased to let his mind dwell on her. To love her was unthinkable. Life, for Charlie, was as simple as that.

After two years of marriage Ed developed political and social ambitions. He had the qualities; his friends told him. He could go far; and he set out, as it were, on the journey.

Charlie worked harder than ever. He had to make occasional appearances in court, when Ed was away campaigning. He had to act as escort to Honoré, when she wanted to go out in the evenings and Ed was busy with his political associates.

Ed's progress was swift. He was elected to the Legislature, then became district attorney, and fixed his ambitious eyes on higher places. At about the same time he grew more exacting in his demands on Charlie. What was the use of having a devoted and slavish satellite, whose sole interests in life were his brother and his work, if one couldn't make use of him?

"Better move some of your traps over to a room in the house, and be prepared to stay there when I'm out of town," he told Charlie. "Honoré is afraid to be in the house at night without a man around. And take her out occasionally, old chap. She likes concerts and theaters, and I'm too busy. If you had any other interests," he added largely, "of course I wouldn't ask all this."

Charlie smiled. He had no other interests, but neither had he any illusions about his brother. He knew that even if he had other interests, Ed would have claimed his time no less ruthlessly.

As the years passed, Ed's demands grew wider in their scope.

"I'm in a devil of a scrape, old man," was a familiar opening remark. "Help me out of it, but don't bother me with the details."

Charlie learned to dread that preface. The scrape was always the same sort of a scrape, and unpleasant for even a satellite to be mixed up with.

Ed became increasingly powerful and increasing critical of his brother.

"You've got to get over these inhibitions of yours," he told Charlie one day. "Above all things you've got to stop being woman shy. There's a big social end to this game, and I'm going to need a lot of help. Honoré's so wrapped up in the kids that she's no use any more. Don't remind me that I've had three boys and two girls in six years, including the twins. I know it. I wish you'd rustle around and find a wife that could get into the game with us. How about Rose Knowlton?"

Charlie's response was not as brisk as usual.

"You know I'm no good at social stunts," he said at last.

"Of course I know it! Great Scott, haven't I been up against it all my life? I'm telling you you've got to make yourself good. You've got to learn the game, and you've got to work right with me. The more I look over the field, the more I see there's no one else I can trust," Ed ended irritably.

That remark ought to clinch the argument for old Charlie. He was already doing three-quarters of the work of the law firm, besides acting as adviser and escort to Honoré and counselor to her children; but of course, if Ed needed a social butterfly in his game, Charlie ought to try to be that, too.

"You know mighty well you ought to have married long ago," Ed went on. "How about Rose? I'm asking you."

"Absurd!"

"Why is it absurd? Don't you like her?"

"She's a high roller, and she wouldn't look at me."

"She'd take you at the drop of the hat. Why, man, you're a meal ticket that any girl would jump at!"

Charlie flushed.

"I don't see myself in that rôle exclusively," he said stiffly.

Ed was apologetic.

"Oh, well, of course, I didn't mean it in just that way. I married for love myself—at least I suppose I did," he added. "It's great while it lasts, and if you want the roses and raptures and all the rest of it, go in and get 'em. I'm simply reminding you that when you do find the girl, poverty won't stand in your way. You'll have a lot to offer her; and believe me you can't do better than Rose."

"I can't go around deliberately looking for a wife."

"Then let Honoré pick one out for you—if she can take her mind off the twins long enough." Ed Wallis was the type of husband who is jealous of his children and can't help showing it. "She's the pal of the nicest girls in town—or at least she always was till she submerged herself in the nursery; but I bet she'd advise you to choose Rose."

Charlie Wallis spoke sharply:

"See here, Ed, I don't like your constant criticisms of Honoré!"

"You don't, eh? What d'ye know about that?" Ed stared at his brother, surprised, amused, slightly annoyed. Then his hand fell on the other's shoulder. "You're right, old man—it's beastly taste; but I do feel up against it sometimes, when they're all squalling at once. The last time we gave a reception Honoré was called to the nursery three times."

"Little Tom was sick."

"Only a little croupy, and Miss Maxwell was there to look after him. She knows more about kids than Honoré will ever learn—even if she gives the rest of her life to the subject, as I begin to see she intends to." Ed disregarded his brother's warning frown and went on with growing feeling: "Why the devil am I paying a trained nurse the yearly salary of a college professor, if my wife has to stay in the nursery all the time, too?"

"She doesn't. You're not home very much, you know, Ed. By the way, you're not making the married state seem very attractive to me," Charlie pointed out.

"That wasn't good generalship!" His brother grinned. "Just the same," he added, "I'm going to have Honoré pick out a girl for you—if it isn't Rose I miss my guess—and teach you how to win her."

"I won't take any lessons till I've thought the matter over," Charlie murmured with unexpected firmness.

"Will you then, if Honoré will undertake to give you some tips?"

"No, I won't. I think all this is infernal nonsense!"

"See here! Why are you so keen on staying single? Are you—" Ed's eyes narrowed, his voice took on a sudden edge. "Honoré has gained twenty pounds in six years," he went on, "and she looks as if she had ten children instead of five; but are you still interested—there?"

His brother's face grew white. The little scene had taken place in the Wallis house, and the brothers were standing in front of the fireplace in Ed's study.

"If you don't take back that question," said Charlie very slowly and distinctly, "I'll kick you the length of this room!"

"H-m-m!" Ed's eyebrows rose as he studied his brother's face. Then he nodded. "I'll take it back," he said cheerfully. "It just seemed odd that you won't let Honoré help you, when you know she's been dying to marry you off ever since our wedding. She's practically offered you every girl she knows."

"I know." Charlie spoke grimly, recalling the long procession of débutantes Honoré had dangled before him as if they were gifts on a Christmas tree. "I'll look over any candidates she has in mind," he agreed, and the interview ended with that concession.

Honoré took the new job seriously. She was a much married woman of the type that regards celibacy as a tragedy. She had mourned over Charlie, and she was happy to receive the news of his open-mindedness.

"Rose Knowlton is the girl, of course," Ed pointed out in one of the conjugal discussions that were becoming so rare in his home. "She's one of the prettiest girls in town, and she certainly knows how to dress. You're still chums, aren't you?"

"She comes to the house once or twice a week."

"Then have old Charlie on hand; but give him a lesson or two first, for the love of Mike. Teach him that it isn't enough to sit around and grin like a Cheshire cat."

"Charlie has a charming smile," said Charlie's sister-in-law.

"Well, teach him to shoot an occasional remark through it. Tell him the sort of thing girls like."

Honoré began wisely.

"Charlie's awfully interested in you,"

she told Rose, after a preliminary verbal skirmish intended to make it clear whether Rose was interested in any one else; "but you know how shy he is. If you're willing to consider him, you'll have to give him lots of time and rope."

To Charlie she said:

"Rose has been half in love with you for two years."

"She can't possibly like me," said Charlie. "We're too different."

"I suppose it's the working out of the law of opposites," his sister-in-law conceded. "You know how gay and chatty she is. Perhaps you rest her—you're so quiet. You rest me," she added thoughtfully. "Sometimes when Ed has been blowing around the house like a blizzard, and he bangs out and you come in, I feel as if I'd got out of bedlam into a cool, quiet church."

Charlie was startled. He gave her a quick look. He had begun to wonder if Honoré was happy; but her thoughts had evidently turned back to her activities in his interest.

"So be yourself," she relieved Charlie by adding. "Ed thinks you ought to imitate him, but I don't. You needn't make any advances, either, till you've made up your mind."

"That's a comfort!"

Honoré ignored the dryness of his tone.

"Of course, you've got to indicate interest," she added; "but you can do that by being around when she comes. She knows you usually drop in to see the children on your way home from the office, and that's her pet time to drop in, too. It will take some of your time away from the children," Honoré added regretfully; "but that can't be helped, and it's in a good cause."

## II

At four o'clock that afternoon, as he sat opposite Miss Knowlton, sipping his tea, Charlie felt increasingly self-conscious. Both women, however, made it very easy for him. Honoré was busy with tea balls and with the twins, who had been permitted to come down and drink warm milk out of teacups as a special treat. Privately their mother believed that to the young couple seated before her their infant charms would be an added argument in favor of matrimony; but as one of the twins playfully emptied his cup of milk

into Miss Knowlton's lap, his charm was momentarily obscured.

Rose took the episode with genuine good humor, as if it were a joke, and Charlie thought better of her. Subsequently she talked animatedly and interestingly about a woman's golf match at the country club that day. She had won the match, and was in high spirits. She was clever and rather merciless in her descriptions of the other players. Charlie studied her from a new viewpoint.

Anne Maxwell came in to take away the twins. She was a small, pretty, feminine thing with a quiet authority that he had seen demonstrated many times in the nursery. The twins, aghast at being torn from the party, and hastening with resentful howls to the shelter of their mother's skirts, suddenly yielded to the allure of a race to the door, suggested by the nurse, and participated in by her. They got to the door first, and found themselves on the other side of it, racing for the staircase, before they realized that they had left their Eden behind them.

"She's always able to manage them, and yet keep them happy," Honoré said. "She has a thousand ways of doing it. The minute they begin to be naughty, she thinks of something so interesting that it diverts their minds."

"That seems to be about the only way to prevent naughtiness nowadays in all of us—to divert our minds," Rose suddenly suggested.

Charlie met her eyes.

"I believe in that, too," he admitted.

"I'm sure you do."

For a long moment their glances held. When they dropped, each looked thoughtful.

A few weeks later Honoré took her pupil to task.

"We're not making any headway," she abruptly announced. "I'll have to have you both to dinner a few times a week. That may help."

But Charlie shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, "but that's impossible. Ed is loading me up with work, and I'm busy every night. By the way, Ed suggested the dinner, didn't he?"

"Yes. He seems in a hurry to have you married. He can't understand why you don't make up your mind."

"We haven't been making this experiment a month yet," Charlie mentioned.



"I know, but matters are just where they were in the beginning. I had to admit that when Ed asked me. Can't you warm up a bit? Send her some books and flowers. Take her out in your new roadster for a drive before dinner."

"She has her own car."

"I know, but she'll be glad to have you drive her, and it will give you a chance for an occasional intimate chat."

"It will take away more of my time with the children," Charlie pointed out; "and I don't see much of them any more, as it is."

"I know. They're complaining about that, too." Honoré hastened to make the obvious point. "That's another reason why you should speed up a bit. Ed seems to think it's important."

"Ed—" Charlie began, and abruptly bit his lip.

She looked at him curiously, but he did not finish the sentence. Apparently her words had impressed him, however, for next morning he telephoned that he was taking Miss Knowlton out at five o'clock for a drive in the roadster.

"It's only for an hour," he said. "She's engaged for an early dinner, so we must be back by six. That will give me half an hour to run in on the youngsters before I go home."

"Splendid! And then you can tell me—"

"There won't be anything to tell," said Charlie hastily, and he spoke the truth.

Nevertheless, he and Miss Knowlton talked earnestly during the entire drive. Charles Wallis opened the conversation with a directness that stunned his companion.

"Rose," he said, when they had reached a quiet road away from the main traffic, "you and I have known each other for six years."

"Yes, ever since we were bridesmaid and best man at Honoré's wedding."

He could see Rose get ready for what she thought was coming.

"We haven't seen a great deal of each other till lately," he went on; "but I've been studying you pretty carefully, and I've decided that you're big enough to face the truth."

"The—the truth?" she echoed, taken by surprise.

"Yes—and the truth is that this scheme of Ed's won't work. I'm sure it was all his

scheme. I don't believe you had anything to do with it, except perhaps to agree to try it out. Ed can talk any one into almost anything," Charlie added with a sigh; "but you and he are all wrong about this, and you're sensible enough to know it cannot be put over."

He saw that she had whitened and stiffened, but she did not speak. She was waiting for more, with an effect of stunned intensity, and he went on.

"I've known for the last two years that you and Ed were in love with each other," he said quietly, his eyes on the road before him. "I think I've known the whole progress of the affair—how far it has gone, and how often you've met—"

"It hasn't gone any farther than it should have gone," she fiercely interrupted.

"Don't get excited. I know it hasn't."

"And we haven't met—very often—except by chance."

"The chance that makes Ed haunt the country club when he thinks you'll be there, and fish for invitations to affairs you're going to attend," Charlie pointed out. "He's been decent enough not to have Honoré invite you to the house much, when he was home, but I suppose he thought that would be too much of a risk. I know you haven't gone too far, but wasn't it rather unwise to dine at Ralston's last week? It's an out-of-the-way place, but—it hasn't the best of reputations."

She almost rose from her seat.

"You—saw us there?" she gasped.

"No, but some one who did told me about it."

"It's the first time I ever dined alone with him."

"I know—but it was foolish, wasn't it?"

There was a long silence.

"The episode frightened me," Charlie said gently, "for it proved you two were getting pretty reckless. Now this new scheme of Ed's—to have you marry me—shows that he has about reached the limit. Oh, don't misunderstand me," he went on wearily, as she tried to interrupt. "I suppose he *thinks*—you both think—you'll keep within the law. He'll still have his home and his wife and his children, and he'll have you, too, in all but one detail—and you'll be perfectly safe. He really means it to be that way, because he doesn't want his career interrupted by a scandal. That's about all that's holding him back; but do you really think it will hold him

back very long? It hasn't always held him back with other girls."

He turned to her and met steadily the lightning darts of anger and pain she cast at him.

"Surely you don't imagine you're the first, or the only one?" he added in a gentler tone. "I'll admit you're a different type; but that won't save you. Come, now, look at the thing straight. Knowing Ed Wallis as well as you do, are you foolish enough to think matters can remain as they are?"

He stopped and tried to meet her eyes again, but she was silent, and after a brief wait he went on, as if there had been no pause.

"You know they can't. Ed's a creature of passion and impulse. He'll break over the traces some day and wreck your life and his own. After he has done it he'll be sorry, and whine like a frightened school-boy. Then he'll get out from under, if he can, and leave you to take the brunt of it. What I'm here to find out is whether you're willing to do that alone; for I'm not going to marry you, Rose. I'm not lending myself to this scheme at all. I pretended to play into Ed's hands because I wanted to know you better than I did, to find out what sort of a woman you really are. If you end this mess here and now by cutting Ed out of your life, you'll have a friend in me always. If you don't—if you stay in, now that I've warned you—you're going to have a relentless enemy in me. I'll move heaven and earth to get rid of you!" He ended very quietly. "I don't intend to have Ed's life and the lives of his wife and children ruined by you or any other woman, if I can prevent it; and, in one way or another, by fair means or foul, I know I can."

"I won't stand threats," she brought out in a choked voice.

"I'm not threatening. I'm merely laying all my cards on the table in a calm, dispassionate showing. I'm paying you the compliment of assuming that you have a balance wheel, and that you're going to use it. It all rests with you. Why not go to Paris for a couple of years, and form new interests and divert your mind? If you decide to get out, you'll have no trouble with Ed. In either case, I'll have a talk with him to-night."

He removed a hand from the wheel, drew out his watch, and glanced at it.

"I'm going to give you ten minutes to make up your mind. When you've decided, let me know, and I'll take you home; but remember that if you go on it is you who will lose and you who will pay. It's up to you to decide whether the game is worth the price."

### III

"No, there's no engagement," he told Honoré in her living room half an hour later. "There won't be any. Rose is sailing for Europe next week, to be gone two years. I'm not her type, so that's that. Besides"—the boyish smile she had learned to love flashed out at her—"the name of my future wife is Anne Maxwell. I've been in love with her for a year—been seeing a lot of her in the nursery, you know, and she accepted me when I ran up there half an hour ago. Little Tom caught us kissing each other, so he'll probably mention it at the breakfast table; but now you're prepared."

Honoré looked at him with joyous, shining eyes.

"Oh, Charlie, I'm so happy! She's the ideal wife for you—a born mother! I picked her out for you as soon as she came, but Ed couldn't see it. Don't imagine I haven't suspected you two were in love; but"—her voice grew apprehensive—"Ed will be awfully disappointed. He was sure Rose would be the right one. Won't you be afraid to tell him?"

"No," said Charlie simply. "I won't be afraid to tell him." He added a surprising statement: "I've never been afraid of Ed."

"Come to think of it, I don't believe you have," Ed's wife said slowly; "but you've always done what he wanted you to."

"Usually," corrected Charlie, smiling. "Not always."

Suddenly the eyes of Honoré Wallis filled with tears. An instant of vision was given her, and she saw her brother-in-law more clearly through that mist than she had ever seen him before.

"You're a good deal of a man, Charlie," she said in a low voice.

Charlie Wallis shook his fair head. He was only thirty-four, but his hair was grayed at the temples.

"I'm a good deal of a satellite," he said soberly; "but since you and Anne think I'm a man, I'm content."

# Backlash

TOM FOGARTY, FIRST-GRADE DETECTIVE, TELLS OF THE  
MEANEST CRIMINAL HE EVER HAD TO FIGHT, AND OF  
THE STRANGE TWIST OF FATE THAT BROUGHT  
THE CROOK'S CLEVER SCHEME TO NAUGHT

By Charles Francis Coe

**M**E, Tom Fogarty, first-grade detective, I should tell stories! The trouble with me is, I tell them as they happened, and that doesn't go so big with readers. There are lots of good stories I cannot tell because they show a bad man triumphing for a while, and that is dangerous for all the young men growing up out in the West. It is dangerous only because they cannot follow things through to the inevitable end, which shows the smartest crooks that ever lived eating off tin plates and pressing their clothes between coarse blankets and a steel grating.

Just the same, a man doesn't put in nineteen years on the police force, go all the way from a rookie cop to a first grader, hop all the humps of politicians and crooks alike, and keep the old pay check coming regular, without getting a few slants on human nature that speak for themselves. I have seen men and women under all kinds of conditions; and though I am not one to sermonize about right and wrong, I have learned that there is something in life on the side of right which very often outmaneuvers the slickest brains.

I was a third-grade detective, which means new to the bureau, when I ran across a case that will live in my memory as long as I have one. It will also prove that there is something bigger than just men and minds—something that works on the side of justice. It was one of those cases that come two or three times in a life, and to me it seems worth telling.

I ran into it unexpectedly, just as cop-pers so often run into big cases while they are chasing ordinary stuff. At the time I was under orders to keep an eye on a law-

yer named Feldin. The orders came from the chief inspector direct, and made me feel that I was being given a chance to do my stuff. That was what I wanted.

Maybe you don't know what the line-up is. It takes place at headquarters every morning, and we are all supposed to be there if possible. We go down, slip on a mask—which is a laugh, because every crook knows us anyway—and then watch all the men and women who have been pinched recently, parade across a platform. Very often a man may be brought in just for acting suspiciously, and then, when he faces the line-up, one of the boys recognizes him for an old crime and books him in on that.

I was standing there in the mob scene, watching different ones walk across the platform. They would start them at one side, make them walk, stop, speak, then turn around. In that way we were able to see their gait, their posture, and their faces, and hear their voices. It is hard for a crook to get by with all those things when he knows he is being watched closely.

I plucked Big Jim out of the line-up one morning after he had been taken in for drunkenness. For three years they had been looking for him for robbery, and I got him because he fell for a surprise question and stopped walking in a natural manner to answer. He had a queer way of standing, and I spotted him from that.

It was during that line-up that the chief came to me.

"See me in the office, Fogarty, after this is over," he said.

When you get it straight from the chief like that, it hits you square between the

eyes. I nodded and stood there, pretending to watch the parade, but my mind was filled with just one thing, and that was:

"What does he want of me?"

"There are crooks and crooks," he said to me, when I got into his office; "and the one I want you to get is about the rottenness of them all. I have seen men come in here charged with murder, Fogarty, to whom I would have given my money, and for whom I have hoped acquittal; but if I could get this one, and get him right, I'd give six months' pay and visit him every day in the can just to laugh in his face!"

"A killer, sir?" I asked.

"No, not a killer. It takes a certain kind of crazy nerve to be a killer. This rat hasn't even that. He's a thief, Fogarty, but in the eyes of the law he never stole a nickel. I'm willing to lay you a neat little bet that there are ten men doing a stretch for crimes this rat engineered."

"A fence, sir?"

Maybe I should have let the chief do the talking, but I was new at the racket. Moreover, I was steamed up a lot, and anxious to do the job he wanted.

He was patient with me, just as he always is with everybody. The chief is a white man.

"Nope—not a fence, Fogarty," he went on. "This man is a lawyer—a smart one, too. We never have had a single thing on him legally, yet he has sat right in this office and admitted to my face that he was as guilty as ever a man was!"

"Take me into court, inspector," he'll say to me. "Go ahead—take me in! I'll run you dizzy, and you know it. Don't try to ride your bum third degree methods over me, because you can't. I know my game, and I assume that you know yours. If you do, you know enough to lay off me on what evidence you can show!"

"And, Fogarty," the chief admitted frankly, "I did. I had to lay off. He was in the driver's seat. I bowed low and graceful, and Feldin was on the long end of the stick once more."

"Feldin?" I asked. "Is that his name, sir?"

"That's it—Horace Feldin. You're new in the bureau, Fogarty, and that works two ways. First, it gives you a chance to make a name for yourself; and second, it means that Feldin is less apt to know you. I want you to live near that man every minute, boy. I want you to trail him until

we can get something definite to go on. This is no personal spite on my part—I guess you know that. It's just that this man is the nastiest thing I have ever struck in human form. He makes others do his dirty work and others do the time he should do himself. He starts people wrong, Fogarty—actually gets young fellows, starts them off in crime, and then lets them take the rap when the rap comes."

"A guy like that," I said, "'most anybody would like to get, Mr. Inspector. What have I got to go on?"

"Little enough. His office is over on Arthur Street. He specializes in stock swindles, and he knows the law inside out and backward. He plans well ahead, and, so far, he's never overstepped except where some technicality in the statutes makes it safe for him to get back. Outside in the files there are reports that will tell you about several things we are morally certain he has done. They'll give you a line on how he works. Be mighty careful, because if you overstep a hair he will land you before the commissioner and frame a case on you that will make your spine curl!"

"Am I alone on this job, sir?" I asked.

"If you want it that way, boy, yes. I've had several good men working on it, and they all admit failure. Feldin gets wise to them instantly. He knows I'm after him, and he keeps a sharp eye peeled. That's why I picked you, Fogarty. You are new to the bureau. Even here very few of the men know you."

I went out to the files and found the stuff on this Horace Feldin. A cop is just as human as anybody else, and there are people we love to get and people we hate to get. This Feldin was meat for us. He was a mean guy. I found where he had framed four young fellows on stock swindles, and made them take the rap, because they had taken out the licenses to sell the stock and registered their names with the Blue Sky Commission. Feldin himself escaped free, because they couldn't show anything on him.

Every one of the four saps told the same story. Feldin was the organizer and the brains, Feldin guided them, Feldin told them what to do and how to do it, but Feldin never signed anything, and there was no way to prove that he got any of the money, though everybody knew that he did.



In sentencing the four young fellows, the judge made it clear that he thought them dupes of a smarter and more crooked mind, and regretted that the law failed to enmesh the real criminal. He let the four off light, but what is that? They had a record, a conviction, and they got a chance to absorb a little prison dope, which sticks by a man as long as he lives.

## II

So that was my quarry—Feldin. I did some tall thinking that morning, and finally I went back and asked to see the chief again. He let me in right away, and I put my proposition to him square and open.

"I would like to work very close to this crook," I said. "I want to get at him from the inside, where I can see what's going on and know when to drop on him solid. It's the only way to fight a rat like him, and I think I know a way to do it."

"Shoot!" the chief invited.

"I want to be dropped from the force through you, sir. I want you to fire me out for insubordination and let the papers know it. Let the gang here know it, too."

The chief was never a man to show his feelings much. He sat there quietly and waited for me to go on. I did so.

"Then I want to get to Feldin through some contact that you must have here. He has friends somewhere, sir, that we can reach. I want to go to him as an enemy of yours. Such a man has a lot of investigating and fixing to do, and an ex-cop ought to appeal to him as a steady diet, especially if he thinks the ex-cop hates you. Anyway, inspector, it's worth a chance. It may take time, but if I ever get his confidence we can look at what he's doing with a fair amount of understanding."

The chief sat there for some time. He was a big fellow, and one that any white man would have to like. He started out on a beat, the same as I did, and he worked up through politics, but with ability enough to make good once he got the chance. He was a square shooter with the men, with the crooks, and with everybody else.

He had a habit of rubbing his chin so that the whiskers sang, and he did that for about five minutes while I sat there waiting to hear what he thought.

"Go see Andy Spickles," he said at last. "Andy has every reason to want to stand well around here, and he knows Feldin.

He runs a printing shop down town, and he printed some bum stock for this crook. He's never slept a night since, I guess, because we panned him pretty hard trying to get the low down. He's scared stiff, and he'll reach Feldin for you, if anybody can."

"You like my scheme, then?" I asked, happy as a clam.

"I'll like it a heap better if it works, Fogarty," he replied, grinning; "but I'm game to try it, if you are."

"I'll start in the morning sir," I said.

"Good! See Andy before noon. I'll see to it that he's expecting you. You can tell him what you want straight from the shoulder. I don't mind if you scare him a little bit."

"I'll see him, inspector; and am I fired now?"

"For rank insubordination, you damned whippersnapper," he told me. "Go ahead, Fogarty! I'm through with any man who tries to bring political influence into my office and tell me what my job is. You can demand a hearing, if you wish."

"I get the point, sir," I said. "It will be better if I don't demand a hearing. That will make Feldin think I fear the truth."

"It will also make him think you're tied up with some petty politicians who may be useful to him later on," the inspector added. "You can come here for your pay while you're fired. Good luck!"

Through Andy Spickles I reached Feldin. I scared poor Spickles pretty badly by telling him that we were going to ride him on account of his dealings with Feldin, and that he'd better help us get the lawyer if he wanted to save himself.

Feldin I found to be a little man with close-set eyes that were as bright and nervous as a squirrel's. His head was round as a ball, and his forehead bulged out over a hook nose. Above his ears ran a fringe of jet-black hair, but the top of his head was as bald and shiny as the dome of a mausoleum.

He was a man you would look at twice. He had a narrow pair of shoulders, and they seemed to sag downward across his chest into a paunchy stomach. He wore a blue flower in the buttonhole of a light suit, and a blue handkerchief and necktie.

He sat behind one of the biggest desks I ever saw, and it made him look all the smaller. His hands, white and soft and a

little fat, were always fussing with papers on the desk, and when he talked every word was accompanied by a rustling of the papers. It was as if he was afraid he might say something wrong, and hoped the sound of the papers would conceal it if he did make a slip.

A big diamond twinkled from a platinum setting on the little finger of his left hand, and he liked to raise that hand and fuss with the blue handkerchief, so that you would see the sparkler. I hated him the minute I saw him, yet I had to admit that he was a smooth and pleasant talker. The longer I am a cop, the more I wonder how sensible people fall for crooks. This Feldin seemed to me to show glue right up to his elbows.

"Spickles told you about me, I guess," I said. "I had a talk with him because I know he has the sense to keep his mouth shut."

"That's a lot of sense," Feldin replied, smiling evenly; "so much that it's rare to see."

His voice was as soft as music, and he had a way of weighing each word, so that you seemed to see it pressing down his lips before you heard it. I never saw a trick quite like that before, and it held my attention. I sat there watching the words on his lips and wondering just what they would be like when they turned into sound.

"I know from the way Andy handled himself with the chief," I grunted. "The chief don't stand any too well with me, Mr. Feldin, but he's a good questioner, and you got to hand it to him for talking to suspects. He knows how to grill a man."

"I know the chief," Feldin said. "My experience has been a personal one with him. In fact, we have talked together."

His words trailed off into a nasty, boastful little laugh. He might just as well have told me in so many words that he had made a fool of the man whom I had called a good questioner. He was a boastful little crab, this Feldin, and right away I pinned a lot of hope on that fact.

"There's another reason why I came to you," I said. "I heard what the chief had to say about you."

He took that out of a spoon, and we spent ten minutes talking about stuff I made up as coming from the chief. During that time Feldin told me all about the boys from the department who had been

on his trail, and how he had laughed them off in failure.

"You see, Fogarty," he explained, "what they don't seem to realize is that a criminal is a man who violates the law. I never do that. I do not make the laws. I simply obey them. My dealings are necessarily with people who find themselves in trouble with the law, and for that reason your old boss sees fit to harass me."

"Which he can do," I said, pretending to be angry, "better than any guy I know!"

After that we got down to business. I told him I thought he ought to have work for a man like me, because I understood how to get facts about people, and had the sense and the training to keep my mouth shut. He did not fall very quick or very easy. It seemed to call for a lot of thinking on his part.

I visited him two or three times over a period of a month, and each time I got a little closer to him. The last time I told him that I hadn't earned a dime since being fired, and I had to have some money to live on. I asked him for an advance, and he kicked in with fifty dollars. I could see that he was glad to have me under obligation.

I turned the money over to the chief, and we both felt that I was making good headway.

Two weeks later I got my first job from Feldin. He wanted me to find out about a man who was starting a business down town. I found out all he wanted, which was nothing but character stuff and family stuff, and turned in the dope to him. Feldin never let me know why he wanted information, and after doing four or five jobs for him I was about ready to think he was playing on the level; but a lucky accident fixed that for me.

I discovered that one of the men I was looking up was Feldin's closest friend. That steered me straight. He put me on that job to check me up. I gave him the whole story, and then waited the thing out.

I wasn't in his office much, because he never had any one there but clients. His letters were typewritten by a public stenographer who had an office in the same building as his own. I made a note of that, and finally took the chance of going to her—she was an elderly woman with gray hair and a keen sense of business—and showing her my shield. I asked her to keep an

extra copy of everything Feldin wrote, and to keep it quiet, just between herself and me. She promised to do so.

That was the way I worked on the man. For three months I never got a thing, but I had every letter he dictated, every contract he drew up, and a note of every telephone conversation, checked and filed away. For all they told me, but for one thing, they might have come out of any law office in the country. That one thing held me on the trail, however.

I noticed in his letters that he often repeated one phrase:

Such matters are ill handled by correspondence, and I suggest a personal conference.

He seemed to like that phrase, and it was always written the same. In his telephone talks he had another way of saying the same thing. We found this in the shorthand notes at least fifty times:

These things are much better settled face to face, where misunderstanding is less apt to creep in. Come and see me.

Of course, he preferred personal conferences because he had no stenographer and no one in his office to overhear what was said. I dared not try a dictaphone, because he was too smooth, and I figured he would inspect his office carefully before each conference. I knew half a dozen men he had talked with several times, but I dared not approach them, either. They were men who sought his crooked counsel, and to talk with them would be to scare them away, and to warn Feldin as well.

So, as a cop often has to do, I just sat back and waited for the breaks to come my way. I repeat that I always depend a lot on that mysterious thing I mentioned before—the power that works, in its own strange way, on the side of right.

### III

It was during that dull time when I was waiting to trip up Feldin that the big thing came along. It came through Feldin. He asked me to check up a lad named Casper Fonk. Casper was easy to find, because he worked as a bond salesman with one of the big financial houses. His record there was excellent, and they thought his character fine.

I got a look at him, and he had the air of a small-town youth making his way in the city. Those lads are a fine breed and

not apt to get into trouble. I wondered a whole lot just what Feldin had in mind for Casper.

Then, from the telephone and mail reports, I began to hear more of Fonk. He had conferred with Feldin three times. The upshot of it was that about a month afterward he quit his job with the bond house and opened an office of his own. The name on the door was "General Utilizers Corporation," but Fonk's name appeared under it as sales manager.

"A good lad, I think," the lawyer said about him. "Though your old associates think me something of a demon in a den, the truth of the matter is that I have helped many a young man to get a start for himself. Casper Fonk is just another of them. I wanted to be sure of him before I went ahead, because he has used me as a reference in some rather important matters. That is why I had you look him up for me."

I knew he was lying. I knew that somewhere there was dirty work; but I never could find it.

I checked up and found that the General Utilizers Corporation was chartered to deal in stocks and bonds, and that Joshua Green was treasurer and Samuel Mirtel president. Fonk's name did not appear in the incorporation papers, neither did Feldin's.

Acting on a hunch, I called on Fonk one day. He had a fine layout in the offices, with a girl doing his typing and a young man with inky fingers and warts working at a bookkeeping desk. He took me into a private office and treated me very politely.

He was a slick young chap, and the best salesman I ever saw. His voice was like an opera singer's, and he chose his words well. From hanging around bond houses he could mention a million dollars as if it was a dime.

We smoked a cigar, and I told him that I was just making a follow-up call, because I worked for Feldin, and had once checked Fonk up for the lawyer. I watched him very close as I said that, and could see no sign of suspicion in his face.

"Feldin is very careful," he said. "I suppose a lawyer has to be."

Then I asked how business was, and he told me it was fine. His job was the financing of General Utilizers, which, he told me, was a great industrial scheme that

would cut the cost of about everything from toothpicks to grand pianos. He was only the sales manager, he pointed out, but Mr. Green was the boss, and would take good care of him when the financing was completed and executive positions were open in the new organization.

It looked all right. I couldn't find a weak spot in the works; but I have learned to wait, and to work while I am waiting. It stood to reason that there was something sour in the plant. My job was to find it.

In two months Fonk's offices had doubled in size and were as busy as a Coney Island concession. He had twelve salesmen selling stock, and General Utilizers looked like a sure shot; but with all his success, Fonk kept his head. He spent no money in the white light section, and he was on the job every day.

As a last resort I decided to have a look at his past from beginning to end. I found out that he came from a little town in the northern part of the State, and I went up there to look around.

The place was typical of small towns. Its industries were a creamery and a mill owned by the village squire. There was a little hotel, with the owner doing an undertaking business on the side and running the barber shop to fill in his time. Over it all was a dreamy peacefulness that seemed to drip from the green hills and steal along the brown, dusty roads to take you in its arms and rock you to sleep.

I found Casper's father without any trouble. He was a character. Just as you could tell that Feldin was a crook by looking at him, so, in the same way, you knew that old Fonk was as honest as the day is long—simple, true enough, but honest.

He was willing enough to talk. That was what he did best and loved most. He would talk about anything from the international debts right down to the contract the squire had let for the painting of his barn, all with equal certainty of himself. As he talked, he would wave a hand browned by toil of the menial sort and wiggle the left nostril of his nose—which, be it said, had grown large under the treatment, and spread across his cheek like the partially exposed root of an old tree.

He was dressed in shabby clothing. His suit was unpressed, and shone like the lights over a burlesque show. His beard peered through browned skin, and the veins of his forehead stood out as big as

telephone wires. He made quite a picture, and his talk was rich with the country twang that some of the cleverest actors in the world have looked foolish trying to imitate.

Finally I brought him around to the matter of his son, and a cloud of concern on his forehead vied with ready words of praise on his lips.

"A great boy!" he told me. "Saounds like a dream, the way thet lad hes come to the front. Left here on'y a year ago, say-in' as haow he'd make a fortune. Darned if he ain't headin' tew dew it, tew!"

"He is a smart lad," I agreed. "I have met him several times."

From the father of Casper Fonk I learned that the young man "warn't above takin' the advice o' his elders." In other words, the father had always told him that the reason why some men were rich while others, with more brains, were poor, was capital. He told me now how he had stressed that point in the boy's mind when the youngster had once contrasted his father to the squire who owned the creamery and the mill and rode around the town in style.

I am not much on imagination, but I could see those two talking about such things—the son a wide-awake, thinking, ambitious combination, the elder Fonk trying hard to maintain a fatherly dignity, easy-going, dreamy, and, in truth, lazy. The father had breathed the air of these hills too long. He talked too much and did too little. His tongue was too alert with excuses for the procession of failures that had made up his career.

Just as a matter of precaution, I remained in town long enough to check up on what the old man told me. Guarded inquiries convinced me that he had never heard of Feldin. By talking with several townspeople I finally learned one fact worth noting. This was that the lad was sending money home to his father to take care of, in order that the family might some day stand well in the quiet village.

It was little enough to go on, but it was something. If young Fonk was sending money home, I believed that he was doing it without Feldin's knowledge, because nobody was likely to send money away from the lawyer if he knew it. There might be a chance, I felt, of setting Fonk and Feldin to fighting each other. That is always a good way to trip up crooks.



I went back that evening and talked with old Fonk again. It was easy to get him to talk about the money he received. Like most failures in life, he loved to talk about his own abilities, and he was very proud to tell me that Casper Fonk was sending him money to care for.

"Casper's young," he told me. "He's needin' o' mature advice, an' he's wise in trustin' money to me. Down thar in the city thar's too many wildcat schemes fer a youngster to match up with. He sends along money an' tells me what to buy. Bonds, he says, allus bonds, an' he hitches on a list o' them to guide me."

The old man laughed tolerantly, and I joined in. This boy who was making more money than the father had ever dreamed of making was still a boy to the old man—a boy needing help in the handling of investments.

#### IV

IN due time I talked in detail with the chief, and we decided that we would have to make a sudden move and take a chance on results. It was clear that things were moving too slowly the way we were working, so we decided to try an old game on Casper Fonk.

"It looks like our best bet," the chief said. "We're morally certain that some one is being gypped by this sweet pair, and maybe we can either wheedle or scare the facts out of young Fonk. Suppose you go drag him in here, and let's talk a bit!"

So, with my heart in my mouth, I went to Casper Fonk's office. He greeted me with his usual smile and started off telling me about the success of General Utilizers; but I stepped on that.

"You probably know that I am a copper," I said.

"I understood that you used to be," he replied, "but you got into some trouble with a superior."

"Come down and meet the superior," I suggested. "He's got a little something to talk to you about in connection with this General Utilizers thing."

Fonk made a mistake there. Right away he said:

"Why not get Mr. Green or Mr. Mirtel? They are the officers. I only work here for them. They can tell you all you want to know."

He was too ready to shift responsibility.

"You'll do," I growled. There's a fine

art in being able to growl right, and at the right time. It scared this Fonk. He began to twitch his fingers, and his eyes darted around. "You can tell us all we want to know. I hope you won't make me be—rough."

I made that sound very suggestive.

"You mean—I'm under—I'm arrested?"

Fear was in his voice, and I felt glad of it. I told him to put on his hat and come with me.

The chief went to work on that young man with the hand of a master. He scared him to death; but all that Fonk would say was to get Green or Mirtel—that he only worked for them. When we asked him where Green or Mirtel could be reached, he wet his lips and told us that he had never seen Mirtel, but that Green met him every Monday at a hotel in Jersey and received the money for the General Utilizers stock that had been sold the preceding week.

The chief brought out a point that I had missed when he remarked that General Utilizers sounded very much like General Utilities, and that the latter was one of the best listed stocks on the market. I found out, too, that the chief had not been idle while I was working. He pointed out that he had some of the stock certificates that Fonk had been selling, and that they did not carry the name of the printer on them.

"Why do you suppose that is?" he asked Fonk, thunder in his voice. "Somebody ashamed of the printing job?"

Then Fonk said that he had a right to a lawyer, and the chief agreed with him.

"What lawyer do you want?" the boss queried.

"My own attorney," Fonk whimpered. "I want Horace Feldin."

The chief laughed in high glee.

"You know who to pick! For an honest and innocent man, Fonk, you have fine ideas on lawyers! Lock this simp up, Fogarty," he ordered me. "I guess we got him, all right. Another sucker for Feldin—that's all he is!"

"Can't I get bail?" Fonk asked me, when I put him in. "I never was arrested before, and I don't understand these things. I can't stand this. I'll go crazy in here!"

Tears came to his eyes, and his fingers twitched just like his lips. I shrugged, and took pains to put him where he would feel

it most. When I left him, he called after me:

"You promised to get Feldin. Get him quick, will you? I'll pay you for your trouble. I'll go crazy in here!"

Well, I thought we had played our hand almost out without getting anywhere; but I went back to the chief, and found him ready to have a pleasant chat with Horace Feldin. He had already sent for the fellow. I waited around, kind of nervous myself, because I wanted Feldin, and wanted him bad.

Finally he showed up. He greeted the chief with a smile, and me with elevated eyebrows.

"Back on the force, Fogarty?" he asked easily.

"Yeah," I sneered. "I got what I went after, and came back."

"The force is to be congratulated," he cooed at me. "Moreover, you look as if you need a steady income."

"He'll have it," the chief smiled. "He's done a little job I've been wanting done for a long time. He's tripped you up, Mr. Feldin!"

"Well, well!" The lawyer smiled confidently. "For a man who has never been at variance with the law, I seem to receive lots of attention from its minions."

"Can the highbrow lingo," the chief snarled. "You might as well know that we've got you hooked right on this General Utilizers thing. Young Fonk is in for keeps, and you're next!"

Feldin laughed in his teeth. His hands played with the papers on the chief's desk, and his eyes darted and darted. Finally he said:

"Inspector, you're a damned fool! I know more about General Utilizers in a minute than seven colleges could teach you in the rest of your natural life. Why be idiot enough to sit there and try to run a bluff on me?"

I never saw a man as cool or as sure of himself.

"General Utilizers is a swindle," the chief roared. "You know it—you formed the corporation. I've checked every paper you sent to the Blue Sky Commission, I've checked your falsified assets, and I'm ready to prove that every statement you made in order to get them a license is the sheerest fabrication. The whole thing is a brazen and criminal swindle."

"Perhaps so," Feldin said, "though I

am amazed to learn of this. Of course, the statements were brought to me duly certified and sworn. It was no part of my job to check them. I served the corporation as an attorney, incorporated it on its own sworn papers, and then ceased to function. There you have my entire connection with the matter."

"And your fee for that service?"

"Is none of your business, my friend! I am a busy man. I understand that a client of mine has been arrested without a warrant, and is now being held. I demand to see him!"

"You may." The inspector bowed in mock formality. "He awaits you, my friend, just where you are going to be yourself before many hours pass!"

Then he nodded to me, and I took Feldin down to see young Fonk. They had a red-hot session, during which Feldin told the youngster that he must have been saving a lot of money, because he never spent any, and if he expected Feldin to get him out of this mess he would have to pay plenty—ten thousand dollars, to start.

The kid raved, and called him a crook and lots of other things, but Feldin remained very calm. Finally he yawned and made as if to leave. The kid called him back and promised to pay. Feldin made a motion as if he was writing a check.

"Wire my father at this address," the kid said. He scribbled the address on a paper and handed it to Feldin. "Wire him to come at once. I have been sending him my money. I will get ten thousand from him and pay you as soon as he gets here. Just get me out of here, Feldin! I'll go crazy in this place!"

Feldin shrugged and went out. On the way he deliberately went to the chief's office and offered himself for arrest. He had more nerve than any man I ever saw. The chief appeared to be very angry, called the lawyer a dirty little crook and liar, and ordered him out. I thought we were licked; but I didn't know the chief as well then as I do now. He had a little joker up his sleeve.

## V

I EXPLAINED to the chief, after Feldin had left, that he was going out to wire young Fonk's father, and that he was holding up the youngster for a ten-thousand-dollar retainer fee. The boss shook his head, and his eyes showed that he was

madder than I have ever seen him before or since. He rubbed his whiskers until they fairly whistled, and as he did so he worked his heavy jaw in and out. He was mad, all right!

"Get Spickles, Fogarty!" he snapped at me after a moment. "Get that bird in here. We've run a little bluff on Fonk—let's do the same on Spickles. There's not much we have to go on, but he's a yellow rant, and may fall if we press him hard."

I went out and telephoned Andy that if he wanted to eat his meals off crockery instead of tin, he would be in the chief's office in fifteen minutes. There was the whine of a puppy in his voice when he promised to be there. I went back, and found the chief fingering some of the stock certificates of the General Utilizers Corporation.

"No printer's imprint, Fogarty!" he grunted. "That's the tip-off, if only we can figure it out right. Spickles printed this stuff as sure as you're born, and the only reason he left his name off was because he knows Feldin is a crook, and he feared being dragged into something that might go sour. It's no crime to print stock, of course; but the very fact that he left his name off shows that he feared something—knew something that scared him. It's what he knows that we want. I'm going to boil it out of the little runt before an hour passes!"

I sat tight and watched the chief work on Spickles. It was a sweet piece of business, the way he did it. He worked everything from the high voice and the pounding fist right down to the come-on gag about being Andy's friend. Spickles was all tangled up inside of five minutes; but he stood pat, for the simple reason that he was more afraid of Feldin than of the chief.

At last the chief hit the right angle. He spread out one of the certificates and roared:

"Is that your printing, Spickles?"

"No!" Andy whimpered.

"You lie!" the chief bellowed. "You know you lie! Here, Fogarty, bring in my notary—the man outside the door. We'll just put you under oath, Spickles, an' let you answer that question!"

I stalled through the motions of going out for the notary, and I tipped the outside man on what the chief wanted. He breezed in and told Andy to hold up his right hand. Spickles did, and the way he

shook made his arm flutter like a flag in a high wind.

"Now answer!" the chief snarled at him. "Go ahead! Lie to me while you're under oath, Spickles, and I'll send you up the river so far it'll take ten years to get a telegram from you!"

Andy fell for that.

"I printed it, sir," he whined. "I printed the stock. I didn't know it was against the law. I—"

"You did, too!" the boss hammered at him. He knew, just as I did, that he had got the wedge into Spickles at last, and the rest was bound to come with a little patience. "You knew it was crooked, Spickles. That's why you left your imprint off the certificates. Ain't that true? Answer me!"

"Ye-e-es," Spickles admitted. "I didn't know it was crooked, Mr. Inspector, but I was afraid—afraid of—"

"Feldin!" the boss chopped in. "We know all about that, Andy. Now why were you afraid of Feldin? What has he got on you? Before you answer, Spickles, I'm going to be fair enough to tell you straight that we already know what he's got on you. Feldin right now is in the can!"

Spickles shrank up like a potato chip under that blast. He was scared blue.

"Young Fonk is in, too," the boss went on. "They're all here. You were the last one we took, Andy. We're more friendly toward you. You ain't really a crook—you're just a little simp that smart guys have used; but you'll have to pay the price, just the same. I'm sorry. Mebbe you can make it easier for yourself if you make it easier for us."

"Feldin's my lawyer," Andy Spickles mumbled. "I ought to see him. He told me never to talk without him bein' around."

"Very well!" The chief shrugged. He was a peach of an actor, the inspector. "Very well! You had your chance. Fogarty, beat it out to cell nineteen and bring Feldin in here!"

I turned away as if I was going to do it, though we all knew that right then Feldin was as free as the air. I got to the door before the boss spoke again. Then it was to Spickles, who sat hunched up in his chair, with tears on his cheeks and his fingers welded together by the fires of fear.

"I'm sorry, Spickles," he said. "No

cop likes to catch small fry like you. I gave you every chance; but it does bother me to see you fall for Feldin and his old game. You know as well as I do that he'll throw you over to save himself, just as he has done to half a dozen other suckers. Right now he's making a statement against young Fonk that will send the kid up the river. He'll send that kid, and he'll send you—all just to save his own dirty hide from a beating!"

That was the last straw. The chief's bluff had worked.

"I'll tell!" Spickles gasped suddenly. "Lemme have another chance, chief—I'll tell the truth! It'll be good to get it off'n my mind. To hell with that sleek lawyer—I'll talk, an' then you got to be my friend!"

I stopped at the door. The outside man, who had posed as a notary, but who was really the boss's stenographer, spread out his notebook and Andy told the works. It was what we wanted, all right—led us straight to Feldin.

The story was that Spickles had printed some stock certificates for use by certain other of Feldin's victims. He matched good stock perfectly, printed off the stuff, and the gang used the certificates as collateral in various parts of the country. Then, because Feldin had been mixed up in that and knew the story, he used Spickles to print other stuff, thus covering any possible trail that might have led to himself.

We got it all in writing, signed and witnessed. Then the chief told Spickles that he could sit around the office until a conference with the district attorney could be arranged.

I went after the district attorney with a special note from the chief. I knew right away what the chief wanted to arrange. He wanted to make very certain of Feldin while he had him. The district attorney was in on that.

I was there when they interviewed Spickles. Finally, at the earnest request of the chief, the prosecutor agreed to give Andy immunity on the all-important stipulation that he must be on hand to testify fully against Feldin.

That done, we had Mr. Feldin's reception well baked for him. Feeling pretty well pleased with ourselves, we sat back to wait until the lawyer came in to see Fonk again, and to collect the ten thousand that

Casper's father was to bring. We all got a lot of joy out of the situation.

Feldin came in next morning with a wire from old man Fonk, who promised to arrive shortly after noon. I walked with the lawyer down to Fonk's cell and stood by, ready to choke the little rat, while he told the kid the news and sneered confidently about his being the only lawyer who could save him.

He was the only one, too. He knew every trick and turn of the charges against young Fonk, and every twist of the incorporating they had done. The kid simply had to have Feldin for his defense. I wondered what he would say when we slipped Mr. Feldin into the cell alongside him on charges worse than those that he himself had to face!

On the way out I led Feldin into the chief's office. My hand happened to be on his arm as we went in. The boss had arranged things so that the lawyer saw Andy Spickles sitting there, his cheeks tear-stained and his whole body shrunken from the ordeal he had passed through. I felt Feldin's arm muscles tighten, and I shoved him gently ahead.

A blind man could see that Andy Spickles was a changed man. The chief was grinning the kind of a grin you see on a man's face as he looks at a table loaded with his favorite food.

"Hey, Feldin!" he boomed gayly. "I guess you know Andy, here. Andy's a printer—prints stocks, you know. Guess he's printed some for you at one time or another. Andy and I've had quite a talk with the district attorney."

Feldin could stand no more in silence. He shrugged and smirked in disdain, but his whole face twitched and twitched, and I saw that fear brooded in his eyes.

"Don't talk, Andy!" he snapped. "Don't say a word! They're trying to run a bluff on you, that's all. I'm your lawyer—do your talking through me!"

"Yeah!" Andy sighed. "You'd be my lawyer, just like you're young Fonk's! I've already done my talkin', Feldin—done it all—every bit of it, by crackee, an' I'm clean with the police. You'd 'a' done it to me, just like you did to all the rest. I just beat you to it!"

Now it was Feldin who shrank back and went white. The chief was tickled to death. His voice sang like a taut wire in the wind.



"The people of the State of New York against Horace Feldin of the City of New York—hell, Feldin!" he sang. "This is the best treat I ever had! Here, take this warrant for your arrest, or, if you like, I'll read it off to you."

He really had a bench warrant, sworn out while I was down the hall with Feldin and the kid.

"You rotten framer!" Feldin roared, his back to the wall.

"Take him, Fogarty!" the chief snapped. "He's yours by rights. Lock him up in five—there's plenty of initials scratched on the walls of that cell. If he wants papers to rustle, give him this!"

He handed me the warrant, and I stuffed it into Feldin's limp hand. Then, for the first time, I felt the little cuss in my grip, and I knew I had him. I just happened to recall the face of poor old Fonk at that second.

I caught Feldin by the neck, and, though I may have been mistaken, I thought he resisted. Of course, in a case like that an officer has to use force against criminals, so I—well, I put him in five. Young Fonk, in four, collapsed when we did the trick.

## VI

THAT afternoon the old man from the little town arrived. He came to me and wept so that tears ran down his big nostril and over the leathery skin of his face. He told me over and again that there was some big mistake; that there never had been a dishonest Fonk, and never would be. I had heard that sort of thing before; but when the old man said his boy was being victimized by some one, I knew he was right.

The father met the lad in his cell. There followed the most amazing scene I ever saw in all my police experience—the old man broken, weeping, helpless; the son in the meshes, pleading his honesty and telling the simple father what must be done; the lawyer in the next cell boasting that a warrant and a conviction were two different things, still promising to beat the case, and demanding his big payment.

"This man is the one lawyer on earth to save me, father," young Casper said. "He formed the company; he knows every wrinkle of the law. We must pay him his price!"

"Right allus prevails," the old man

muttered. "Ten thousand dollars is too much fer defendin' an innocent man, son. Right will win without lawyers like this man. I don't trust his looks, nohow. We can get a cheaper, better counselor."

Casper got mad.

"Whose money is this?" he demanded. "Father, I want you to do as I say. You've never amounted to a damn. I'm the one that got the money—you aren't. This is no time for your barber shop philosophy about right prevailing. I'm in jail, and without this man's help I'll stay here. Sell ten thousand dollars' worth of those bonds I told you to buy. Do it right now, get the money, and give it to this lawyer. Then we can fight. I'll go crazy in this place!"

The poor old man straightened up, and his big nostril quivered.

"You're talkin' to your pa, Casper," he said in pitiable dignity. "Thet ain't no way to speak to your elders—specially your pa. I won't have it!"

"Sell the bonds!" Casper snarled. "What's the argument about? I can't stay here, can I? It's my money, isn't it? Go and sell ten of those bonds, and bring the money to me here!"

The old man's chin was still up, and his brown, horny hands worked convulsively on the bars of the cell. A strange light shone in his eyes, and there was a sort of wild look about his face and gestures. In a pitiable tone he insisted again:

"Right will prevail. No innocent man is needin' o' sech a lawyer as this—ten thousand dollars!"

"You sell the bonds!" Casper snarled. "I tell you I'll go crazy in here! Sell them, and get me the money for Fe'lin. It's my money, isn't it?"

The old man clung to the cell bars, his shoulders shaking. I began to feel that he never would sell any bonds for the smart Mr. Feldin. I guess young Fonk began to see it, too. Suddenly, in a frenzy, he began to pour the whole rotten scheme into his father's astounded ears.

"I'm not innocent!" he barked huskily. "Do you get that, you old fool? They've got me cold if Feldin don't defend me. I'm guilty! We worked together on it all, and I'm as good as gone if he don't handle my case."

The old man staggered back, caught the bars again, and seemed to sag there, with only his brown hands holding him up. His

face was seared a pale brown, and his great nostril quivered like a rabbit's.

"The whole thing was a swindle," young Casper blundered on, heedless of Feldin's howled demands for silence. "Feldin fixed it all. We imitated the name of a good stock, and worked our salesmen in the rural districts. That was the game—we went after the countrymen who would fall easiest. Feldin got up the statements, and I signed them as both Green and Mirtel. There are no such men. It was all Feldin and me. When I was supposed to pay the receipts to Joshua Green, I wrote a check to him, indorsed his name on it, and then cashed the check and sent the money to you. It was all Feldin's idea. I paid him in cash, too. Now do you see? Damn that bunk about right prevailing! You're up against real life now, old man. Barber shop gab don't go here! This is no Sunday school deal! Feldin can still beat the case for me, but he's in himself now, and he won't do it unless he gets his ten thousand. Sell the bonds—sell 'em right now, understand? Get that money here before the banks close!"

I had been watching the old man. I was convinced now that he never would sell the bonds—convinced, in fact, that he could not sell them, because he did not have them.

Something of the same thought hit Casper when he had finished his tirade and was looking more sanely at his father. I saw him wet his lips. I saw his mind grasp the horrible suspicion and reflect it into his eyes and his haggard cheeks.

"Father!" he mumbled, his voice trailing off like the distant howl of a nocturnal

cat. "For Gawd's sake, father, you got the bonds, ain't you?"

The fight had suddenly gone out of the boy.

"No, I ain't!" replied the old man, his head high and his wide nostril quivering like a maiden's lip at the movies. "No, I ain't got no bonds. I got what's better'n bonds. I'm an older man than you, son—heaps older, an' I've allus knowed I could do better than men like the squire ef I had the capital. Your money was the capital I needed to prove it. I've like to doubled it a'ready!" There was pride in his voice as he spoke. "Yes, siree!" he cackled. "I've like to doubled the money a'ready. Only three days ago I got a letter from the company tellin' me thet the stock was nigh doubled in value!"

"Stock?" Casper Fonk questioned, his voice as thin as a bride's veil. "Stock?"

If you've ever heard defeat in a man's voice—defeat and stark terror—it was in his at that moment, and you know how it sounded. I watched the drama with eyes bulging.

"You failed to follow your son's orders?" Feldin demanded in a menacing tone. "You bought no bonds with the money he sent you?"

"Bonds," the old man rambled along, pride high in his voice and his shoulders squared again, "pay 'most nothin' in interest. I used the capital to perduce more capital. I bought this here new stock—General Utilizers!"

The poor old chap wasn't far off in predicting that right would prevail, although he surely didn't foresee how it would come about.

### TO A SEA GULL

BIRD, flashing and swerving,  
Over the sea flying low,  
Slant winged, upward curving  
Into the northeast blow,

Lone bird with no other  
Wing between sky and sea,  
Speck in the gray, wild smother  
Poised in immensity,

Pinions, proud, and umbrageous  
And swift as the storm and night,  
Beat on with breast courageous  
The poem of thy flight!

*Francis Livingston Montgomery*

# The Third Schoolma'am

PHYLLIS MEEKER HAD BEEN VERY CLEARLY WARNED THAT HER TWO PREDECESSORS HAD MADE FOOLS OF THEMSELVES OVER TENNY ZODECK, AND YET SHE—

By Lenora Mattingly Weber

OF the six coal oil lamps around the wall of the schoolhouse, two had burned out, and the biggest one was smoking its chimney black. Some of the mothers were waking their babies and swaddling them in wraps; but still the fiddle squeaked on, and the fiddler's second wife plied the organ keys in unbroken regularity. Old Homestead Barrows was calling a quadrille:

"Big, black cow and a little red calf—  
Meet your partner with a once and a half;  
Now swing on the corner like swingin' on the gate!"

Phyllis Meeker, schoolma'am, felt her heart lift in her throat with a queer little flutter as she swung on the corner like swinging on the gate. Tenny Zodeck was on her corner. Tenny Zodeck was in high-heeled boots, and he wore a gray checked flannel shirt that did not scratch a girl's cheek like the mail order suits some of the men wore. His arms were not exactly like bands of steel, because there was a certain give to them when he swung Phyllis. He bent his head to talk down to her.

"Aw, come on now—ditch your dry farmer and go home with me!"

"Now your own," singsonged Homestead, "if you're not too late!"

Phyllis wasn't too late, though Tenny Zodeck had swung her around longer than a swing on the corner should last. Her "own" was Higby Sulz. She knew the feel of his hands—moist and warm. His face was moist and warm, too.

"Alamand left, and a grand right and left!" called Homestead.

"My little old cayuse 'll ride double," said Tenny Zodeck, as he alamanded left.

Then came Higby's calloused but loose-fingered grasp. Higby's red face was per-

spiring as if he were hurrying after the plow horses. He was a good fellow, a hard worker.

"He ain't no lady's man, Higby ain't," Mrs. Darlow, with whom Phyllis boarded, had said. Higby was Mrs. Darlow's brother, and his homestead claim touched theirs. "Just the same," she declared, "he has good intentions when he goes with a girl."

But Tenny Zodeck had not—Mrs. Darlow had told Phyllis that, too. Mrs. Darlow had told the school-teacher before Phyllis Meeker, and the school-teacher before that. Higby Sulz had started going with each one of them; then along had come Tenny Zodeck, and they had made fools of themselves over him. And had he cared? Indeed he had not. He had just laughed in his sleeve at them.

"Now why in the world don't you left the other man?" inquired Homestead Barrows, never once breaking the rhythm of the jig tempo.

Tenny Zodeck's hands were the kind that pulled you toward him. Higby sometimes fumbled through a dance, but Tenny knew every move before the call left Homestead's tobacco-stained lips. Tenny Zodeck's eyes were teasing her. Phyllis was in a maze of seesaw music, and dust, and wonder.

Another lamp had burned out. She had told little Mary Darlow to put a new wick in that one, and Mary hadn't done it; but it didn't matter.

Phyllis caught a vindictive look from Mrs. Darlow, an I-told-you-so look. It brought Phyllis back to the world of teaching, and prairies, and people who worked hard, and people who talked about their neighbors. She was afraid of the pale-

eyed, overworked Mrs. Darlow. She was afraid of her tongue.

Phyllis Meeker had always been afraid of tongues. Her fear had guided all her life, all her actions. Her father was a minister in a little town where good people were not always kind. Like her mother before her, she had a horror of being talked about. Well, a girl had to have. There was Aunt Carrie, who hadn't cared what people said. Poor Aunt Carrie!

The quadrille broke up into a tag two-step. Phyllis knew, without lifting her eyes, whose hand it was that clapped Higby on the back.

"Yessum," resumed Tenny Zodeck, "my little muzzle-faced bronc just craves to ride double!"

Phyllis did not look at Mrs. Darlow as Tenny swerved her past. Mrs. Darlow had warned her.

"It beats me what they can see in him to go crazy over," Mrs. Darlow had said.

Phyllis tried to put out the light in her eyes and her cheeks. She was not going to be made a fool of. She had come to this box-supper dance with Higby Sulz. Tenny Zodeck had ridden across the plains on a bald-faced sorrel. Homestead Barrows had put up the boxes of supper for auction, and when Higby Sulz started bidding on the yellow crape paper box, Tenny Zodeck had bid against him. Whatever Higby bid, Tenny Zodeck raised it. Higby had stuck valiantly for awhile. Wasn't it just like Tenny Zodeck to run the price up clear out of sight?

Mrs. Darlow's sharp face was set. Higby's face was red and foolish—and beaten. Tenny Zodeck had won. Phyllis had eaten supper with him. She had heard Mrs. Darlow remark:

"Land sakes, Higby's no fool, to bid that much!"

No, Higby would never squander his money, even though the box-supper fund was to buy a new victrola for the school.

"What's your horse's name?" Phyllis inquired, forcing a coolness in her voice.

"Well, now, he hasn't got any regular name," said Tenny Zodeck. "Kind o' depends on how I feel and how he behaves."

Then Higby tagged her. Higby's horses never varied in name. The plodding Queen was always Queen. They had started about an hour early for the dance to-night because Queen was in foal, and had to be driven very slowly. Higby hadn't told her,

of course, but Mrs. Darlow had whispered its import.

Mrs. Darlow rose reluctantly from the long recitation bench where she had been crowded in with other wives. The men were hurrying them, impatiently mustering the children together.

"Looks stormy in the east," they muttered, thinking of the morning chores.

Mrs. Darlow had had a wonderful time, for there had been much to talk about. A week ago a terrible thing had happened. José Lopez, the Mexican herder, who ran Mitchell's sheep on the flats, had run amuck, as crazy as a locoed steer, leaving his sheep bleating all over the prairies. That night he had attacked Lizzie Ott, the cross-eyed daughter of Mitchell's cook. Lizzie had fought him, and he had slashed at her with a knife. Lizzie's father had come running when she screamed, and Lopez had tried to stick his knife in Ott's heart. He had cut an artery in the man's forearm, and Ott would have bled to death if it hadn't been for a wool buyer who happened by. A regular pool of blood, whispered Mrs. Darlow.

The country had been scoured for José Lopez. The dry farmers vowed that they would string him up to a cottonwood when they found him. Then some one heard that he had been seen at a little town twenty miles down the railroad.

Now that it had happened, there were many to testify that José had been queer—oh, awfully queer!—for a long while. Each one could add to the story. Only Phyllis Meeker said nothing about what she knew.

Twice had José Lopez worked his herd close to the path leading to the school-house and tried to stop her as she went home. Once he had grabbed her arm. She had not understood his mumbling torrent of Spanish, but she had understood the strange, wild hunger in his eyes. She had wrenched herself loose by striking and kicking, and had run down the path, never looking back till she reached Darlow's, though her chest caught her and hurt.

She had lain awake in a terror all the following night, but she had told no one—partly because she had been brought up not to talk about such things, partly because she knew Mrs. Darlow would tell it around, and she could imagine some of those women saying:

"Well, it seems like she must have said something to him, or else he—"



She had been careful, after that, to walk home with two or three of the school children—little Mary Darlow, for one, chattering every step of the way. She hated José Lopez for his slovenly clothes, his greasy, dirty hands, and the animal look in his eyes.

## II

Most of the older folk were leaving now. It would soon be light enough to milk. "Home, Sweet Home"—the fiddler's second wife yawned over the chords, one, two, three, one, two, three. Tenny Zodeck's buddy, who wore a green shirt and a Stetson with a snake band, was fastening on his spurs. Tenny Zodeck had explained to Phyllis that the other cowboy was rope-shy of girls.

"So you're turning me down cold, are you?" Tenny Zodeck made his final plea to Phyllis. "I rode twenty-five miles across the plains 'cause I thought you might dance this here 'Home, Sweet Home' with me, and let me take you home."

"I'll go home with the one I came with," said Phyllis Meeker firmly.

Higby Sulz looked uneasily at Phyllis and Tenny Zodeck.

"I guess I had ought to be hitching up the team," he said; but he dreaded leaving Phyllis standing there with Tenny when the fiddle was wailing a waltz.

"Go right along and dance," said Zodeck, "and us buckaroos that are unattended will get the teams hooked up."

Higby danced with conscious pride. Higby had a girl, and she had stuck to him. She had put Tenny Zodeck in his place—there now!

At last the fiddler put on his overcoat and somehow wedged the fiddle under it. The two lamps still burning were blown out.

Outside the schoolhouse the sore-necked Red Bird and the paunchy Queen were hooked up to Higby's rig. Tenny Zodeck stood at their heads, his red kerchief whipping in the swirling wind of dawn. So this was good-by!

The girl-shy cowboy in the green shirt handed the reins to Higby. Phyllis Meeker felt an embarrassed self-consciousness, as if she ought to be ashamed of this team. The plow collar had rubbed a long sore on Red Bird's thin neck, and Higby had put an old piece of quilt under the collar.

Higby helped his girl to the swaying seat, pulled the old patchwork lap robe over her, and tucked it in.

"Seems like the seat kind o' sags on the schoolma'am's side," observed a wit, and every one laughed.

"So long, Higby!" said the crowd.

Phyllis could remember afterward that a laugh was under the farewell. Higby, in order to start with a flourish—he would slow down when they passed over the ridge—took the whip from the socket and smacked the reins. Red Bird gave a lurch, so did Queen, and an unexpected thing happened. The horses lurched right away from the buggy. The traces came away from the singletrees and dropped. The reins were pulled through Higby's lax hands. His mouth fell open.

How the little crowd laughed at the disconcerted look on Higby's face! It was quite clear now. Tenny Zodeck and his buddy had fastened the harness with bits of string.

Poor nervous Red Bird was kicking and fighting at the traces, which hung around his ankles as he ran, dragging the more reluctant Queen with him.

"Catch them, can't you, fellow?" cried Higby.

Higby's face was a sputtery red from thinking things he dared not say to those two grave-faced cowboys. For only a moment he stood in his indecision. Then he started down the line fence after the horses.

Tenny Zodeck reached up a hand to help Phyllis out.

"As I've been trying to tell you all evening," he said, "this here little juggle-headed sand lizard what I ride carries double just as pretty as you please."

Phyllis threw aside the patchwork lap robe and climbed down from the buggy, with a face white with anger. She was mad—mad at Higby and his foolish running strides as he went after the horses, at the crowd that had laughed at her expense, but most of all at Tenny Zodeck.

"Thank you," she said, "but I'm perfectly able to get home myself." She didn't want her voice to shake, but it did. "I wouldn't think of bothering you."

She started off at a walk, which she tried to make dignified, though the rough prairie twisted her feet and the cactus pricked through her thin pumps. She would not be made a fool of! She would show Tenny Zodeck!

She was so taken up with her anger that she did not heed the wind whipping her thin cape about her, she did not notice that the gusts of wind dampened her face like a moist breath; but she had gone only a part of the distance when she heard hoof beats behind her, and then the running steps of a rider jumping from his horse. High-heeled boots were alongside her now, as he checked himself.

"Say, little Miss Schoolma'am, I'll apologize and crawl in the dirt. I never meant to hurt you. I only thought I'd like to take some of the cockiness out of that old red-faced tiller of the soil. I only thought maybe you'd give me and my old sidewinder here a try out to see if you liked us."

Phyllis trudged on without answering.

"Now the first teacher," Mrs. Darlow had chronicled, "the one I said combed her hair smooth, had been to college—yes, she claimed to be a bachelor of something, and you'd have thought she'd have had some sense; but oh, the way she laid herself out to be nice to Tenny Zodeck! Then there was the black-eyed one, the one that put paint on her cheeks. She was nice enough to Higby, playing the piano and all when he come over. She went with him to Monica that day they had the bronco busting, and Tenny Zodeck rode; and my lands, that night at the dance—well, I wasn't the only one that noticed it!"

Phyllis felt the sorrel's breath on her neck. It whitened in the bronze air.

"But listen here," went on Tenny Zodeck. "There's two reasons why you can't go traipsing across these prairies. One is because that coffee-faced José—whatever his name is—is still uncorralled. And look at that cloud up yonder—spreading all over the sky, and the color of gray flannel. Yes-sum, that old cloud's got a blizzard wrapped up and all ready to deliver, *pronto*."

"If you're afraid of the storm," said Phyllis, "you can turn around and go back. I'm not afraid, and I won't ride with you."

The wind slapped her cape about her. It took the words out of her mouth and slammed them at the cowboy. The smile went out of his eyes, and without that scoffing, teasing smile his eyes were a stern gray.

"Don't be a fool!" he said shortly. "Get up here, before we're both caught

out here and snowed under like yearling calves!"

Phyllis shook her head and started on.

His arms had not been exactly like steel when he swung her to "Turkey in the Straw," because there had been some give to them; but there was no give to them now as he reached out and caught her. She found that out when she tried to struggle away. His hands tightened on her shoulders and he shook her hard—just as she had once shaken the exasperating little Mary Darlow.

"You little angel-faced hellion, you!" he said. "You'll ride that bronc with me if I have to bend you in two and put you in my pocket!"

He picked her up and plunked her down on the horse.

"Ordinarily," he continued, as he swung on, "I'd let you ride in the saddle, but just now we've got to do some riding to beat that blizzard. Hold on to me if it gets rocky."

He leaned over and slapped the neck of the blaze-faced horse.

"Come on, you wall-eyed son of misery, hit the grit!"

### III

DURING the first few minutes Phyllis Meeker was busy trying to adjust her skirt partially to cover both legs, to hold her whipping cape about her, and at the same time to hold on to the leather-coated figure before her. The air, instead of growing lighter with the dawn, was darker—a swirling, gray haze.

And then suddenly Phyllis, trying to raise her head, caught her breath in a gasp. There was neither a path beneath them, nor a sky above them, nor a prairie with a cottonwood tree to guide them. They were shut out from the world by a pounding, stinging, blizzard-mad snow.

Tenny Zodeck had not spoken to her since they started. She felt, rather than saw, that he leaned over and slapped the horse's neck.

"It's up to you, you little old two-eyed Jack! See if you can nose out a dugout, or a shack, or even a corral where we could freeze in peace!"

Phyllis's cape still slapped insubordinately about her. Her arms, as she reached out for it, were throbbing with the cold. Needle points of sleet struck her face, stinging, choking. Tenny Zodeck squirmed

out of his leather coat, turned, and helped her find the sleeves.

"You keep it," she tried to say, but the wind picked the words from her lips and made them only a soundless mouthing.

Sometimes the horse stopped, winded. Tenny Zodeck did not urge it on, save by a little touch on the neck. He was bent to the storm, and so was Phyllis, crouching there behind him. Even after the cold had seeped through and through, even after her hands and face and outstretched feet had lost all sense of pain, she still clung to him, her fingers clipped about the broad leather belt at his waist.

Minutes passed, and hours. At length the horse stopped, stumbling, and half turned its head to the riders. Tenny Zodeck slipped to the ground. Phyllis tumbled off, her limbs helpless. She only heard, and not at all comprehended, Tenny Zodeck's stiff chuckle.

"Dad burn you for a little joker in the hole!" he said. "I do believe it's an old dugout!"

It was a partially caved-in dugout, with a broken door, which Tenny Zodeck could yank open scarcely wide enough for their bodies to squeeze through. The interior was dank and dirty and musty, and strewn with paper chewed to bits by pack rats. Some old coiled rope on the floor tripped their feet. A rusty stove stood on three legs, and a mattress sagged on a rude frame. In the far corner was a pile of ragged bedding, gunny sacks, and rotting sheepskins; but, forlorn as it was, the place was a haven.

Tenny Zodeck sternly ordered Phyllis Meeker to her feet when she would have dropped down.

"Keep moving," he said, "and keep rubbing snow on your face and hands. Get busy on your feet, too!"

With no fuel except moldering paper and a piece of chair which Tenny Zodeck whacked against the stove till it split in hunky pieces, it was no easy matter to make a fire in a broken grate; and when the warmth rose from the stove, it filled the dugout with a still more pronounced musty stench. Tenny Zodeck snouted out two pans and filled them with snow; but they smelled of rats as they sputtered on the stove.

"This is an old dugout Mitchell hasn't used since the creek washed over this way ten, twelve years ago. I remember stop-

ping here with my dad once when we hazed some longhorns through the water. This was the herder's dugout; and wasn't there another one—a little hole in the hill where they kept supplies?"

For perhaps an hour, while Phyllis sat on the edge of the mattress, hating to relax because of its grimy dampness, Tenny Zodeck toyed with the rope lengths. He tested their strength, jerking out the rotten spots that would not stand his pull.

"I'm going to see if maybe I can feel out that little old cave. I know my heavy-hided bronc is tailed to the wind, but I'll drape the saddle blanket over him to help his circulation. You hold on to this end of rope, so I won't get cut loose from my bearings; but don't hold tight, and don't pull, or it's liable to snap."

Phyllis held it, fearful when it was lax, fearful when it pulled taut. When Tenny Zodeck stamped his way back through the door, he held two cans.

"One for dinner and one for supper," he announced.

He put one of them in the kettle of water and tried to poke up the surly fire. His gray flannel shirt, which had looked so heavy at the dance last night, was steaming as he bent over the stove. He shivered convulsively now and again, and Phyllis saw that his face was gray and drawn, as if he had not thawed out even yet.

"I'm sorry you gave me your coat."

Her breath rose in her throat as she said it, like a blush that could not reach the face.

Tenny Zodeck went on humming. He turned the can in the water, which was getting hot.

"Why were you afraid to come with me?" he asked.

They were close together in the dim dugout, the niggardly light only seeping in through a window with the dirt almost completely washed over it. Though Tenny Zodeck lounged against the back of the stove, which was not hot, but only warm, and Phyllis balanced herself on a teetery box on the other side, they were very close.

"I was not afraid of you—the real you," she said slowly. "I was afraid of being made a fool of—of being talked about. You see, I have always been afraid of that, because of Aunt Carrie. Aunt Carrie threw herself at men—she never waited for them. She never cared what people said. My

mother was ashamed of her—even when Aunt Carrie died, and the Ladies' Aid didn't send flowers or anything. My mother always taught me that a woman should hold back."

It sounded strange to tell of that here in a dugout with a blizzard flailing the door, which could only be opened just wide enough to squeeze through. It was strange to think of that little town—the minister's home—the constant fear of public disapproval—the Ladies' Aid whose tongues clicked as they sewed. Phyllis could see her mother turning an expressionless face to her father for a kiss.

"If you want a man to respect you—" Mrs. Meeker had told her daughter.

There was Aunt Carrie. Aunt Carrie was never asked to make cakes and serve oyster suppers in the church basement. Aunt Carrie was dead now, but she had never been forgiven for showing that she cared more for a pale-faced man named Len than for what the world thought.

"I am afraid," murmured Phyllis Meeker, "of being talked about, of being made a fool of, as Mrs. Darlow said."

"I used to be afraid of howling coyotes," remarked Tenny Zodeck; "but now I laugh to see them skulking away if you turn on them. So the old clacking tongue where you board has been busy?"

"She told me about the school-teacher you went with—the one with the smooth hair and the college degree."

("And then," Mrs. Darlow had said that day, while she was picking over the beans, "all of a sudden he dropped her like a hot pancake!")

"She was a neat little package," said Tenny Zodeck. "She could do her share of dancing, and she had trained herself to laugh easy."

"And she told me about the one with the black eyes. Mrs. Darlow said she stayed over two days, looking for you, and the last night she dressed up and waited for you."

"Yes!" Tenny Zodeck turned the can over in the hot water. "A woman can be honest," he mused. "God, I remember my mother. She was Irish, you know. The Irish are not much on bartering or trading, but they give—they give freely. She'd run across the prairie to meet my father—straight to his arms."

"And your father—did he respect her as much as if—as if—"

"She was part of him, and he worshiped her," said Tenny Zodeck. "She died in his arms, and I really think that when she died, so did he. The him that was active and full of life died then, though he dragged around the ranch for a couple of years afterward. Now, then, let's see"—he delved deep in the pocket under his chaps—"what all we got here. Now this here roll of bills stands for two years' work, and it's going back into white-faced steers. I'm on my way to Morgan now. I guess this little old knife—but Lord, it's as dull as Sunday school—will do for a can opener. You get two guesses as to what's in it."

"Tomatoes," hazarded Phyllis.

She wasn't hungry now. She felt all quivery and tumbled about—something like a room which has been shut up for years, prim and orderly, with all kinds of keepsakes, and which is suddenly being torn out and rearranged.

Tenny Zodeck scoured two pans with ashes and then with snow.

"Guess again," he said, sticking in the knife. "It doesn't sizzle like tomatoes."

"Corn," said Phyllis. She was looking at the far corner of the dugout as she spoke—a dark corner in which were piled old bedding and wooly sheep hides.

"Lost!" said Tenny Zodeck. "I'm dad-burned if it ain't sweet spuds!"

Phyllis Meeker gave a low, gurgling scream and clutched his arm, her eyes full of terror.

"Oh, look, look!"

A hand was reaching over the top of an old chair—a hand, and then came a head with greasy, disheveled hair and bloodshot black eyes. It was José Lopez. His face was cut, as if the cook's daughter had made his own knife slip in the struggle; but the knife was still there, the top of it showing above the dirty overalls that were pulled together at his waist.

"*Alimentos — alimentos!*" he whined, and his hand edged toward the knife that had slashed at and half killed the Swede girl and her father.

#### IV

TENNY ZODECK had straightened in stupefaction. Tall, straight, but unarmed, he stared at the wild-eyed apparition.

"I'll give you *alimentos*," he said, "if you give me your knife, you greaser dog. No knife, no *alimentos*, *sabe?*"



Tenny Zodeck divided the contents of the can. He took out a third for each of the plates, and then he approached José with the remaining third in the can. Reluctantly, when he saw he could not get the food first, the Mexican laid the knife on the chair and Tenny Zodeck picked it up before he put the can down. José devoured the food like a dog, so that Phyllis set her own sweet-smelling portion down, sickened.

"Better eat it," said Tenny Zodeck. "You'll need it. Looks something like a little freeze-out party here. You couldn't turn a skunk out in such a whooping blizzard!"

José Lopez was licking the can now, twisting his tongue about the edges. Tenny Zodeck, his watchful eyes on the Mexican, was eating his methodically, though he gulped and winced on some of the dry pieces.

"You're sick," said Phyllis.

"It's this fool throat of mine—gets a spell of the roup every once in awhile."

José Lopez sank down again on the mess of bedding. The snow was completely over the window at the side of the dugout. Even by straining her eyes Phyllis could not see the outline of the Mexican—it was all blurred together.

"I wish I could see clear and think straight," said Tenny Zodeck, and Phyllis noted that his breath puffed out heavily through dry lips; "but Lord, what a pounding I got in my head!" He sank down on the edge of the mattress. "That's it, girl—keep on the other side of me here, so that I'll be between you. There's two things that lobo wolf wants. He wants my roll, because a greaser with a roll won't have much trouble getting down to the border; and he wants you. I could see that. He's run with the sheep and the skulking coyotes so long that that's just what he is. I don't care so much about my roll, but God help his greasy soul if he tries to touch you!"

For a long time Tenny Zodeck sat erect, never once taking his eyes off José. He had kicked the knife far back under the stove. The only thing he could use a knife for, he had said, was to skin a calf. Very erect and watchful he sat, with his heavy, sick eyes watching.

It was close and quiet in the dugout. Tenny Zodeck's eyes began to blink, then to open—blink again—finally close.

He slumped a little lower on the bumpy cot. His lips were relaxed now. Without that twist of a smile to hold them up, they were sagging and dry. Once Phyllis touched his forehead and found it hot and throbbing. She, too, sank down by the cot, her eyes looking beyond Tenny to the corner where the Mexican huddled.

The kettle on the stove was leaking and making a little sizzly whisper. It was all merged together, yet distinguishable—that little steamy whimper from the stove, the gurgling grunt from the corner, like a discontented hog, and the uneven, quivery breathing of Tenny Zodeck.

Phyllis held her eyes open, even though they blinked in the heavy, stagnant air. Was it all real? Funny little visions jerked out at her and passed. She thought of her mother slicing potatoes very thin—her mother meager with life, hoarding; and of Aunt Carrie, who had been lavish, reckless. It was what Mrs. Darlow and those other women constantly talked about. Girls and women, to be respectable, could not be honest with men. They must hide their love, as if it were a thing to be deeply ashamed of.

Now Higby Sulz—a girl would be safe from tongues with Higby Sulz. Higby bred tough mule colts from his mares, and used silo feed, cheap in the winter.

Phyllis's thoughts blurred and slipped softly on. The whispering sounds in the dugout became the catching of a bow across a fiddle.

"Oh, now swing that girl, that pretty little girl!" Homestead's voice often squeaked on the high notes. "The girl you left behind you!"

Tenny Zodeck was swinging her, and his hands were holding her close.

A sense of horror jerked open her eyes. What was it? Tenny Zodeck was still breathing harshly, the kettle on the stove was still sizzling, but there was no hoarse grunting from the corner. It was too quiet—too quiet; but there was another sound—a creeping, dragging sound. If she could see—if she could only see!

And then she saw. She saw a figure, not more than three feet from the cot, lifting itself from a crawling position. She saw a glazed, bloodshot eye. She screamed out, then, and sprang toward the sleeping man, half grabbing at him, half shielding him; for she saw the blade of a knife high in the air, its point aimed at Tenny Zo-

deck's gray shirt, which in its damp softness clung so close to his body as to show just where the last rib partly protected his heart.

Tenny Zodeck's quick jump to his feet threw Phyllis tumbling back. The Mexican's cry of profanity was a terrible thing as the knife clattered, missing its mark. Just as he reached the knife and picked it up, the cowboy hurled himself upon him. Two bodies thudded and grappled, their breathing muttery with curses. The long-handled kettle was knocked down from the stove. Oh, where was the knife?

Then a figure broke apart and ran for the door. By the flapping of ill fitting clothes as he wedged open the door and slid through, Phyllis knew that it was José Lopez. Tenny Zodeck followed.

About fourteen inches the door was open, letting fourteen inches of blizzard sweep in, sucking out Phyllis's breath as she started toward the door. She pulled it shut. No, it must not be shut with Tenny Zodeck outside! She opened it again.

She could not peer through the doorway. Biting needles whipped through her clothing as if it were chiffon. The world that she could see around her consisted of the storm, the Mexican with bloodshot eyes, and a knife with a long blade that had cut the Swede cook till he would have bled to death, if the wool buyer hadn't happened to come by.

So Phyllis Meeker stood there waiting, with the wedge of storm swirling through the door. Minutes passed and minutes passed. She began to sob as she started putting on the foolish cape and the wet, wet hat. She could not stay here and wait and wait—

A foot came through the door, incased in black leather boots. Tenny Zodeck pulled the door shut behind him. He was breathing heavily, but she could hear that smile in his voice.

"I thought all along this here dugout wouldn't be big enough for us and a low-laying skunk. Might have known a Mexican on a rampage would have more than one knife stacked away on him."

"Where is he?"

"I tied him up and heaved him in the rat cellar, knife and all."

Phyllis Meeker walked toward Tenny as he came toward the sullen little fire. She came closer and closer to him.

"Well, here you are, little old covenant of the ark!" he cried, and his arms closed about her, as she had hoped they would. She had sought them. She was quivery and aching for them after waiting there alone. She raised her face to his.

"Tenny Zodeck," she whispered, "please kiss me!"

His arms tightened and tightened until every shiver went out of her, and she was lax, content—only waiting; but he did not kiss her. He only bent her head till her forehead rested in the curve under his chin.

"Lord save us, little white-faced kid!" he said. "With the sore throat I got, I wouldn't kiss my worst enemy."

The wind clattered and clattered at the door.

## V

THE snow was up to their knees, but it was not such a vicious snow now.

"It may be afternoon or it may be evening," Tenny Zodeck had said, "but the storm's easing up a bit. I think, considering all things, we better be ambling for the homestead and the clacking tongue."

Phyllis was in the saddle on the bald-faced pony.

"Come on, you old cowboy's lament!" cheered Tenny Zodeck, walking at his head. "I know your flank's touching your back bone, but better days are coming."

A lavender world with snow falling thickly—so thickly that it coated, slid off, and again coated a black leather coat that Tenny Zodeck made her wear.

"Whither thou goest, I will go—"

But Phyllis Meeker was going back to Mrs. Darlow's boarding house.

Mrs. Darlow was in the kitchen. She closed the door quickly after them, and pushed the old piece of carpet up to keep the snow from seeping through the crack beneath. Land sakes, such a day! Higby had just got Queen in before the blizzard struck, but they hadn't been able to get out to slop the hogs; and what with worrying about them and about the school-teacher—

What Phyllis should have done was to stay at the school, instead of starting off so notionate; but Mrs. Darlow was effusively cordial to Tenny Zodeck. She had put on her best white apron when she saw them ride up. She opened one of her jars of peaches for supper, and even emptied out the old coffee grounds to make fresh.

But Tenny Zodeck did not stay. Phyllis followed him out to the low, smelly barns to ask him.

"Mrs. Darlow says they could make room for you to stay all night. Your horse is all tired out."

"That's just it," he said. "He's plumb fagged, I'll say, and he's dog-goned hungry; but he ain't used to the garbage these *hombres* feed out of a silo. Wild hay he's used to, and alfalfa, and chop when he's lucky. I wouldn't trust him to eat that stuff. He might swell up and bust. I can make it to the Fiddleback Ranch to-night, and I'll get word to the sheriff to go out and get the little surprise package in the cellar by the dugout."

He swung into the saddle there by the horse trough. For a minute he hesitated, looking down at her, and Phyllis wished that she could reach up and button the leather coat over the gray flannel shirt with its jagged tear.

"Well, so long," he said. "See you again one of these days!"

Phyllis watched him ride off. At the barbed wire gate he got off and walked ahead, breaking a trail for the tired horse.

Mrs. Darlow gave a sniff of unbelief when Phyllis explained why Tenny Zodeck would not stay. She took off her best white apron, but she left the tablecloth on, and they had the canned peaches.

Even through the achy weariness that claimed Phyllis, when she lay in the bed beside little Mary Darlow, was that other feeling of tumbling disorder, of upheaval. Tenny Zodeck had shaken her hard and trounced her up in the saddle; but when she begged him to kiss her he had only bent her head, leaving her lips unknissed.

The Darlows had a scraggly dog called Dash. In the days that followed, every time Dash ran from the house barking, no matter what time of day or night it might be, Phyllis Meeker's heart leaped up and throbbed in her throat. Every time the cause of the barking was revealed—sometimes a head of stock coming in to water, sometimes a circling chicken hawk—then her heart settled back painfully, very, very tired from such a leap.

Infinitives and participles for the eighth grade. Yes, hoping, praying, watching—words like that were participles. Magellan's route for the seventh grade.

"A woman can be honest—if you'll just

remember, children—*i* before *e*, except after *c*—whither thou goest—"

Mrs. Darlow's eyes were beginning to be wise, and to hold a malicious triumph. Sunday came. Sunday was the cowboy's day to go girling.

"We train the old bovines to know when Sunday comes," Tenny Zodeck had explained to Phyllis at the dance, "so they always settle down peaceful like and chew the cud they've saved up all week."

Higby hung about all that day, watching Phyllis watch. She could not keep her eyes from constantly lifting to the road. Higby's face, for all its soft redness, could be ugly and mean. Mrs. Darlow thumped around in the kitchen. Her face wore the same look that it had when she had told those stories to Phyllis.

"Yes, and this school-teacher with the black hair turned down Higby for that Tenny Zodeck. I heard him when he rode off the last time.

"So long," he says. 'See you again one of these days!'

"And her school was out a Friday, and there was nothing to keep her over; but she stayed over Saturday, and looked for him all day. As if I didn't know what she was hanging around for, her hair all curled and the perfume doused all over her! Then Sunday—"

Phyllis knew about that Sunday by heart—the red dress that was so terribly low in front, and the paint the black-eyed teacher had put on her cheeks. And she waited up—Lord knows how long she waited up! Mrs. Darlow had heard the clock strike ten, and still she was waiting up.

A long week followed that Sunday. Each day Phyllis stayed after school hours, sweeping, tidying up the school. She didn't need to walk home with the children now, since José Lopez no longer roamed the prairie.

The sheriff had ridden over to the deserted cellar the next day after José Lopez. A surprise package, Tenny Zodeck had said; but José had found a weak spot in the rope with which Tenny Zodeck had tied him. He had found his knife and had turned it upon himself.

Another Saturday! This was the day on which a schoolma'am cleaned her room, washed ties, and pressed dresses. Phyllis would have cried as she went about, but for Mrs. Darlow; and that night, kneeling

to say her prayers, she could not keep back the sobs. She buried her head in the quilt so as not to waken little Mary Darlow.

"Our Father Who art in heaven—"

But she could see Tenny Zodeck riding away through the barbed wire gate—Tenny Zodeck, who tended cattle by day and rode to dances at night; careless and laughing with his lips and eyes, and even with his words, but his heart very careful, weighing and measuring. By what standard?

"But deliver us from evil—"

Her lips murmured it as if God would exact it, but her heart was crying out:

"I want him to come back! I want him to come back! I don't want to be just another schoolma'am."

It was probably the first real prayer that Phyllis Meeker, daughter of a minister, had ever prayed.

## VI

SUNDAY followed Saturday, as Sundays do. The weather was clear and bright. Higby Sulz put on his good suit when he finished the chores. Higby had the air of a man who could take a schoolma'am or leave her—whichever he chose.

Garrulous little Mary Darlow was wriggling into a plaid dress while Phyllis ran a comb through the hair that fell in a tired softness about her pale face.

"The first teacher we had," said Mary Darlow, "combed her hair straight back from her face. She had a picture of a man, and she always kept it in that little top drawer. She told mamma it was her brother, but it wasn't. It was a fellow who sold shoes in Kremling."

"She was the one that laughed so easy?"

"Yes, but it wasn't a real laugh. She used to laugh sort of soft like to herself after Tenny Zodeck would leave. 'I might as well have a good time while I'm out here in the sticks,' she'd say to herself. 'He's good for that;' but the last time Tenny Zodeck left she didn't laugh."

"She didn't?"

"No, but I heard Tenny Zodeck laugh when he went out of the door. 'You should have told me that you was all roped and branded by somebody else, and that you was only working me for a free taxi driver, and it would have been jake with me'—that's what Tenny Zodeck said to her—'but you don't get anywhere with me pretending your card is something it ain't.'"

Do you suppose he meant the picture in the top drawer, Miss Teacher?"

"Back up here and I'll button your dress," said Phyllis.

"And then," Mrs. Darlow had said, "all of a sudden he dropped her like a hot pancake!"

"A woman can be honest," Tenny Zodeck had said.

"The next teacher we had," Mary Darlow went on, with her mother's aptitude for details, "put her hair up on things something like safety pins at night. She was pretty in the daytime, but she wasn't pretty at night, like you are. She sure liked Tenny Zodeck. She liked him better than he liked her, 'cause after he'd go she stand real still with her eyes kind of narrow and mean. One night I woke up, and she was sitting up in bed, and she gave a laugh, like she used to when she was going to whip one of us at school, and she said something about there being a way a woman could always get the man she wanted. This black-eyed teacher was mean, and she told lies. Once at school she twisted my arm. I was glad when she left!"

Dash was not here this day to bark at every sound extraordinary. Dash had taken the day for his own visiting. It was almost noon, and Phyllis had gone for water; and then she saw—she saw.

She stared at a weary, disillusioned desert traveler stares at a lake, thinking that it is only another mirage; for she had seen it so often—a tall figure, and a bronco with one white stockinged foot and a blazed face, coming through the barbed wire gate.

She was still standing there when he dashed up. He did not wear a gray flannel shirt now—it was red and black checked. She wished she could say something—something casual—as he grinned at her; but she couldn't. The white-stockinged bronc had started thirstily toward the horse trough, but he stopped in snorting disdain at the mud that Darlow's ducks had made around it.

"Get on there, you stuck-up kettle of soap!" said Tenny Zodeck, giving the animal a resounding whack on the hip.

Then Phyllis Meeker walked into the low, smelly barn with him.

"Well, here I am," said Tenny Zodeck. "I used my bean this time. This here"—untying a limp gunnysack—"is the chop I brought for my snub-nosed equine. As



for me, I'm all remodeled. There'll be no more roup for me—so that a fellow's offered something and has to turn it down. When I was in Morgan, buying the brockle-faced steers, I also had my tonsils yanked out."

"Oh!" said Phyllis above the pounding in her throat. Sure enough, he did look just a little bit pale. "You shouldn't have come so far. It's a long ride from Muddy Creek over here."

The sorrel was snorting back from the manger, because a turkey was lying in the feed box.

"Don't be getting so proddy, you old second fiddle, from now on!" Tenny Zodeck scolded him; and then Tenny laughed, while his eyes turned almost shyly to Phyllis Meeker, schoolma'am. "Lord save us, a cowboy don't count the miles when his goldarned little old sweetheart is at the other end!"

## A Lady of the Sea

THE STRANGE VOYAGE OF THE CLIPPER YOLANDA—THE  
STORM GODS OF OCEAN HAVE SUNK MANY A GOOD  
SHIP, BUT A TRAITOR ON BOARD IS A VES-  
SEL'S MOST DANGEROUS ENEMY

By Captain Dingle

**S**OME ships seem to know when a master hand is guiding them. Such are the aristocracy of sea ladies. Age may bring a clipper down to sordid trades, or even to the lowly condition of a hulk; but as long as a clipper sails the seas she will react to her handling like a thing of life.

Load her badly, give her the wrong combination of sail when shortened down, and she will protest in a fashion clear to a sailor. A blunt-built butter box of an iron freight drogher, meant only to bear tremendous burdens, may be mishandled, misladen, mis-everything else that can be done to a square-rigger, and it will make little difference, since she will be a clumsy lump of wrong-headedness anyhow; but the clipper, the dainty sea lady, is not only living and breathing, but understanding.

The Yolanda was a clipper, and therefore it was the more of a puzzle to Barney Read to find her grow less and less sea kindly as she reeled the miles astern of her. The weather was good, yet the Yolanda made bad courses in the other watch. She labored queerly, too, when there was no more wind than should have driven her

foaming down through the latitudes in a smother of spray and flying fish.

"It's the way you trim the yards, mister. Haven't you been in a clipper before?" the old man would grunt if the mate remarked about it.

Captain Lute had a way with him—a bitter, unpleasant, evil way. For one who pretended such a deep interest in his ship's behavior, he himself gave small heed to her trim; yet he kept close track of her course in general, always scanning the chart, measuring off distances between the thin line of penciled runs and adjacent islands or coast lines.

Another thing that had puzzled Barney on joining the ship as mate was the way she was loaded.

She was ready for sea when he joined. He saw she was by the head a bit, and no sailing ship ever built would do her best that way; but he was curtly told to get the hatches on, and the Yolanda was towed to sea. New to the ship, and not quite sure what to make of the captain, Barney did his work and kept quiet, though not very well satisfied.

Had it not been that Muriel Grey was

on board, Barney would have seen small prospect of anything but a miserable voyage. As it was, in spite of the old man's surly tongue and evil eye, Muriel so radiated brightness and cheer that much of the ship's queerness was noticed far less than it might have been.

Yet even Muriel proved a puzzle to Barney—for awhile. She called the skipper "father."

"There's nothing in breeding, if he's her father!" Barney mused on the first day at sea.

When the steward addressed her as "Miss Grey," the mate went so far as to ask the man if he had said "Miss" or "Mrs."

"Better ask her father, Mr. Mate," the steward said sourly, giving Barney such glance as to make the evil eye of old Lute seem glowing with benevolence.

Little cared Barney. He went about his work singing, getting the best he could out of men more fit for a farm than a ship, and seeing to it that in his watch, at least, the steering was fair and the trim beyond reproach. Still the ship rooted like a hog, down by the head as she was.

Everything was balanced when Muriel came on deck in Barney's very first morning watch, as the dawn was breaking, and stood at the windward rail, gazing as if enchanted at the rising gold behind the gray horizon. Her eyes and lips seemed dewy. Her hair caressed her face, a filmy frame of loveliness. She, too, was singing:

"Flying with flowing sail over the summer sea;  
Sheer through the seething gale, homeward bound  
is she!"

The sight of her thrilled Barney, and unconsciously he joined in her song. She heard him, and smiled, so that he blushed. Upon the innocent Eden burst Captain Lute, looking from one to the other of them with swift, angry suspicion.

"Did I sign you on to sing, or to sail the ship?" he snarled. "Are the men sick, that the ship's not washed down? Get to your work! And you, Muriel, leave my men alone—hear me?"

"Yes, father," the girl said. "Please don't blame Mr. Read. I don't think he knew he was singing my song."

"Don't mind father's grumpiness. He's always that way in the morning," Muriel told Barney later.

Lute had gone down to get dressed, and the mate looked down from the poop upon sullen men plying lazy brooms while the boatswain shot buckets of bubbling brine among their skinny bare legs. The sun was up, and it was a morning fit to breathe a prayer to. Barney couldn't feel resentful. He smiled back at Muriel, once more keenly scanning her eager, colorful face.

"I'm not supposed to mind anything my skipper says or does, Miss Grey. I'm only the mate; but I'm allowed to wonder."

"Wonder?" she echoed, with a pretty raise of the brows.

"Yes—how you can be his daughter."

Barney at once started to apologize, surprised at his own boldness; but she put him at ease with a tinkling little laugh.

"Stepdaughter," she explained. "Captain Lute was mate here when father owned and sailed the Yolanda. He married mother when father died; but I—"

Lute's step on the companionway stairs sent Barney away from the girl. He was unwilling to cause her further unpleasantness. When Lute emerged this time, Muriel was briskly walking the deck, while the mate was setting the men to work on the poop brasswork.

Barney was humming a song. He had found out one tremendously pleasing fact about her—she was none of Lute's blood or kin. For a moment he wondered just what she was about to say when Lute's appearance interrupted; but it mattered very little.

"Always something to be thankful for—even at sea," he cogitated. "I wonder if she knows how thankful *she* ought to be!"

## II

THERE was no doubt about the quality of the Yolanda's crew. The boatswain might have been a sailorman once, but now he had more of the earmarks of a gang foreman on a jail building job. He got work done, after a fashion, but only when the job was given to him. He had no sailorly initiative. He seemed to be always on the point of telling the mate that work was unnecessary.

As for the second mate, he frankly admitted that he was a steamboat man, and knew nothing of square-riggers. The steward was civil only to Lute. Even Muriel, more often than not, failed to win a civil word or dutiful act from the sour flunky.

Barney kept on the lookout for a chance to enjoy an occasional moment of the girl's cheery company, and Muriel was entirely willing to meet him halfway; but old Lute was on the watch too. He bullied the girl and rode the mate—rode him before all hands, so that very soon Barney was forced to resort to almost forgotten deep water methods to get any sort of obedience or respect.

"The old man's crazy!" he whispered to Muriel in a swift moment of opportunity. "He can't expect me to get work done if he bawls me out before the men. Bad for the ship, too. Some day quick action 'll be needed, and how does he expect me to get it?"

She only shook her head in answer. Often, as the days went by, she seemed to be deeply immersed in thoughts not all easy or pleasant. That was strange, too, for the days were all blue and gold, the merest fleecy tufts of cloud breaking the brilliant blue of the sky, the softest of curling crests whispering to the seas of the sparkling breeze that sped the ship southward.

When squalls began to break up the daily level of placid comfort, Muriel brightened up more than she had during the fine weather. When rain flew in sheets she remained on deck, all rosy and alight with excitement, taking in every phase of the handling of the ship; following Barney, with eyes that glowed admiringly, as he led the men.

"Keep her away to the westward!" Lute growled, when the squalls merged and settled down into a screaming half gale.

"She roots—won't steer—down by the head!" yelled Barney.

He couldn't understand the idea of keeping away to the westward. She would steer better, and make time, too, on her proper course.

"Never mind! You make her steer," Lute retorted. "If you can't, there are men in the fo'c'stle who can, poor as they are. Keep her away, with the wind aft—that's your job!"

Barney waited until the old man had gone below, then bawled for the watch.

"Brail in the spanker! Take all the mizzen canvas off her!"

He stood at the helm himself while the after sails were furled, watching her actions. She still yawed wildly from side to side. Muriel stood at the taffrail behind

him, watching the big seas rising in the wake.

They rose higher as the ship sailed more slowly. One roaring crest flung a bucketful of water over the turtleback and filled the girl's shoes. She ran from it with a little cry, then laughed and returned to her place. To her it was fun.

To Barney, with the wildness of the ship in mind, it was anything but fun. The men were moving forward.

"Take in the main t'gallants'l, and stand by the tops'l halyards!" he yelled.

The mainsail had been furled at the first increase of wind beyond a fresh breeze. Barney took the wheel in his own hands, making the helmsman stand by. As sail came in on the main, he felt the ship dragging more. She yawed almost as badly as ever. It was cruel, the way the fine old clipper was being manacled!

"Take the maintops'ls off her!" he ordered grimly, and silently prayed that the gale would harden, so that the ship might be driven to keep ahead of those following seas.

"Oh, I think those big seas are grand!" the girl cried beside him.

"They are," he gritted. "Too damned grand for this ship!"

"Nonsense! Why, when I was small, I saw her in tremendous storms, and father always said she was the finest ship afloat in bad weather."

"No doubt your father was right," he retorted.

She wondered at his tone, but she would not bother him again. He was sweating at the wheel. She didn't know why, but she respected him for being ready to undertake hard work.

Only the stiffening of the gale kept the seas from overtaking the ship and breaking over her stern. She had only forward sail; she could not run before the wind under any more sail without grave danger of broaching to, so deeply did she bury her overloaded head as she plunged onward.

Muriel clung to the rail, in the shelter of a square of canvas that Barney rigged up, watching the elemental warfare with wide, bright eyes and parted lips, enjoying it all with a sort of fearful fascination. She saw a roaring sea slop over the rail, and uttered a gasping cry when the galley burst from its fastenings and went hurtling across the deck, to smash against the bulwarks. She gasped helplessly when Barney dashed

down into the welter of foam and débris and hauled the cook clear, half drowned, and singed by the outpoured contents of his stove.

"Make the wreckage secure, bos'n. Then all hands come aft to the poop for safety!" the mate shouted; and Muriel thrilled to the sailorly matter-of-factness of him.

She may have wondered, perhaps, why Barney seemed to be so constantly on duty. She knew that the second mate was supposed to share the watches, but Barney seemed to be on deck even when the second mate was on watch. Somehow, she felt much more contented and safe because of that.

Why Captain Lute could not be satisfied was more than she understood. The captain bobbed up at all sorts of unexpected moments, looking as if he never undressed or slept while the gale lasted.

On the second day of the storm the Yolanda began to root more deeply than ever, and Barney sounded the well himself. He went aft with a grimly thoughtful face and reported a leak to the skipper. Lute went on deck and drew out the working chart on the chart table, looking not very greatly concerned.

On the last day, when a sight had been secured, the ship had passed within fifty miles of a small island. Now she was three hundred miles farther on her way, and in her course there lay no land within a week of fair sailing.

"Start the pumps! The water runs forward. Seems a lot," the captain growled. He glowered for a moment at the girl, there in her shelter, aglow with the whipping of the windy spray. "You better get below, Muriel. This is no place for you."

"But I enjoy it, father. I'm quite all right here. Mr. Read says it's safe," the girl pleaded, looking gently mutinous.

"Safe?" the old man snarled, glaring from her to Barney. "Nobody said it wasn't safe. I don't want you up here taking the attention of the men from their work."

"Miss Grey isn't bothering anybody, sir," Barney turned at the ladder to blurt out.

"Don't give me your damned slack!" roared Lute. "Get to your work, and don't dare meddle! Muriel, you go below!"

Barney went along the drowned main

deck to the pumps, to give his men a start. He hated Captain Lute very heartily just then. As he saw to the clearing of the pump lips and the placing of the obviously unaccustomed and unwilling men, he glanced aft and saw the girl slowly and rebelliously entering the companionway to go below.

"Start a song, bos'n," he urged. "Come on, lads—whirl her free! Drier she is, the faster she sails!"

"I don't know no song," the boatswain grumbled. "Why don't you have a wind-mill pump if she leaks this easy?"

Barney let the insolence pass. He had seen much of it in the Yolanda.

The pumping job was monotonous, and not easy. The seas crashed aboard continually, swirling about the men's legs. A song would help. It always did. Barney started one himself:

"Oh, Sally Brown, she's a bright mulatto—  
Way, hay, roll and go!  
Oh, she drinks rum and chews tobacco;  
Spend my money on Sally Brown!"

There was no response. The big iron wheels turned sullenly; the rods clanked and squealed; a gush of water appeared.

"Come on, lads! Put some life into it!" Barney shouted, his own strong arms already doing half the work.

"G'wan aft, and leave the men alone. They can't work if ye're on their backs all the time," the boatswain said harshly.

Barney looked at the man as if about to assert his authority manually. He thought better of the impulse, turned aft, and left the gang to their pumping.

Lute did not appear as anxious as a ship-master should with a leak developing in his ship and a gale blowing. Barney decided to leave the worrying to others; but of course he could not do that entirely, since Muriel Grey was on board. He could keep an eye on her safety, however, and still claim all the watch below that was his, instead of looking after an incompetent second mate.

He ate supper with the girl that night. When he saw the boatswain come down and go to the steward's pantry, and draw no harsh reprimand from either skipper or steward, he let no sign of surprise escape him. He knew the boatswain got rum, for he smelled it.

Through the night the seas grew heavier. In the slaty dawn the ship was staggering



through a wild ocean. She looked forlorn, with the water streaming down from her drenched foresail and topsails, and her two jibs black with wet clear to the head cringles. She rolled, sticking her nose deeply at every roll, and scooping up the seas all along her main deck rails; and the pumps still clanked.

Captain Lute was up early, and at last evinced some interest in the weather and the condition of the leak. The barometer was rising with the steady, slow rise that presages a favorable change. The ship still labored, but she had been much worse.

"Haven't you got the water out of her yet?" he demanded querulously. "When did you sound?"

"Half an hour ago," replied Barney. "Four feet in her then. The men won't sing, and they work like a lot of navy yard stiffs. It's the bos'n. He told me I ought to rig a windmill pump."

Barney made no effort to conceal his disgust. The skipper entered the chart room, glanced at the ship's track, and reappeared.

"I'll not have a windmill on my ship. If you're the sort of mate to let the men tell you what to do—"

Barney swore. Before the old man recovered his breath, the mate was halfway along the main deck, bound for the pumps, still swearing soulfully. Barney's fists were closed, too, and he swung his arms in a way that promised nothing very good for the first man he picked upon.

The gang then at work paid little heed to him. The boatswain was just coming out of his berth, carrying his hook pot to the wrecked galley for his coffee.

"Get a move on with that pumping!" Barney sang out, shouldering among the sullen men.

He seized the wheel lanyard and forced the men to speed up.

"Leave the men be, mister!" the boatswain snarled, stopping abreast.

Barney needed just that incentive. He dropped the lanyard, stepped out, and flattened the boatswain's nose with a drive of his left fist that would have smashed a wooden nose. When the man staggered to his feet, groping for the rolling hook pot, and looking bewildered, Barney was in front of him again, with the right fist ready.

"Don't hit me, mister! I ain't lookin' for trouble. Make them pumps talk, you

fellers! What's the big idea?" the boatswain blustered.

The gang whirled the wheel as if they loved the job—at least until the mate was safely aft again.

When Barney reached the poop the skipper was in the chart room, fiddling with rulers and dividers over a map. The helmsman looked queerly at Barney, and immediately dropped his eyes to the card. Lute turned to the doorway and called out:

"Can't understand how that leak gains so much. Can't have been pumping half the time. Double up on the gangs!"

"They're taking water out now," returned Barney grimly.

The clank of the pumps was like the rattle of a steam engine lacking oil. For an hour the mate stood at the poop rail and saw to it that the pumping never let up. All the while the seas were going down and the gale losing its bitter weight. The wind shifted, too.

"Call the watch, and set the main and mizzen topsails!" Barney roared.

The men obeyed briskly. The boatswain, his nose still bloody, jumped to the job almost like a good sailorman, darting a glance aft that plainly said he sought no more attention from the mate.

"Were yo' ever down in Mobile Bay?

Oh, roll the cotton down!

A rollin' cotton fo' a dollar a day—

Oh, roll the cotton down!"

Barney stole a look at Captain Lute. Here was a result to be noted. The men were howling a hauling chantey without being driven to it. They kept right on until the topsails were set and the spanker hauled out; yet the captain still wore a scowl. The wind was falling light already, and it had steadied abeam, so that the ship sailed without rooting like a hog; but still that scowl on the skipper's face!

There was no appreciable change in the leak even at noon, though the breeze by then had died to the lightest of airs and the sun shone pleasantly upon a placid sea. Barney went on deck at seven bells, when the captain took his sextant up for the noon sights, and found the boatswain and four men there waiting. All the forenoon the second mate had been on watch, and the men were employed making good the damages about the decks.

The moment Lute appeared, the boatswain stepped forward, a finger at his nose.

"Mr. Read knocked me about cruel, sir," the man said. "For nothing. These men seen it. He abused them, too. Are we to stand that? The law says—"

"Yes, yes—never mind the law!" the skipper cut in irritably. "Go for'ard. I'll see into it."

"You'd better, if you want yer work done," retorted the boatswain impudently, giving the mate a saucy look.

Barney stood in amazement, wondering how the old man meant to take that; but Lute waved the men away, fell to work with his sextant, and got his sights with unusual care. Then, as soon as the observations were safely secured, he set down his instrument on the chart room settee and faced Barney with red anger in his eye.

"I'll have you understand, mister, that my men are not to be knocked about by you! The bos'n is a good man, and knows his work. Keep your hands off him, or I'll get me a mate who can work the ship without brutality!"

"Brutality?" Barney was stupefied. "Do you expect a mate to take guff from the bos'n? See here, Captain Lute, you've cracked on more than once about getting another mate. If you think you can—"

"Well?" interrupted the skipper, grinning expectantly.

"Nothing!" snapped Barney, suddenly thinking of the girl.

It may have been conceited of him, but he did have an idea that what pleasant hours she spent aboard the Yolanda were spent in his company. If he were disgraced and sent into the forecabin, good-by to her company—good-by to those pleasant hours for her!

### III

THE days following were not easy for Barney. He was a good mate, and he knew it. It galled him to encounter open indifference in the crew, and to know that it was winked at by the master. Indifference grew until it became general insolence and rank neglect of duty. The ship began to look like a garbage scow. Ropes lay in bunches instead of coils. Yards hung askew; sails that were slack-sheeted were never trimmed; halyards that gave after a night's dews were never sweated up.

The only sign of interest evinced by Captain Lute was in the steering, which he scrutinized fiercely, and in the pumping,

to which he drove the men for all their insolence. The ill feeling between master and mate persisted, and, on the master's side, increased, until every man in the ship knew that the afterguard was divided against itself.

Even Muriel showed that she noticed it. She stole little moments to talk to Barney; but she was careful to avoid letting her stepfather catch them together, and she never permitted herself to speak of ship's affairs. When she could, she would chat of things they had found themselves to enjoy in common—the thrill of sailing, the beauty of the sea, the departing glories of clipper ships.

Barney puzzled over the skipper's idea of holding so far to the westward. With the leak gaining daily, in spite of all the men could do at the pumps, and in spite of the pleasant weather that persisted after the gale, it would seem to any sailorman that the wise course was either to put back to the last island sighted, or to hold more easterly, so that the ship might get into traffic lanes, and perhaps in touch with the coast. Day by day, however, old Lute pricked off his position and measured the distance between points of land, getting farther away from any port. He held his course as if satisfied, yet watched the pumps anxiously, growing a scowl that darkened hourly, and making the lives of everybody near him wretched with his surliness and venom.

The steward alone appeared willing to endure without audible complaint. The boatswain frequented the pantry in a manner that staggered Barney Read, who was used to ships conducted in shipshape fashion. The mate had resolved to let the voyage tell its own tale, so far as he was concerned; and he would have kept quiet, obeying orders to the letter without comment, but for one small happening which he really had no right to notice.

Going on deck one day at eight bells, he reached the companionway door at the moment when old Lute was forcing Muriel inside, and cursing at her savagely. She cried out that his grip hurt her; and Barney jumped forward and wrenched the grip off with no pretense of apology.

"Captain Lute, you forget yourself!" he snapped.

Lute stared at the mate, and at his own wrist, which bore bloody signs of Barney's intensity of purpose. Muriel stood inside

the door, her usually pleasant face marred with real anger. She rubbed her arm, too, as if it pained her, and that steeled Barney for whatever might come. It came quickly.

"Lay hands on me, will you? Damme, that's mutiny! Go to your room. I'll see you hanged for this! Get below!"

"Don't be silly!" the girl burst forth. "I'll let people know it was no mutiny, but a gentleman defending a girl from a foolish old beast! Don't mind him, Mr. Read!"

"You go below, too!" the captain stormed.

The girl did not obey. Lute caught her about the waist and rushed her down the stairs, and Barney heard her cabin door shut upon her still protesting.

"You take your dunnage for'ard, Read! You don't belong aft," rasped Lute on his return. "You won't get off with that, either. The minute we anchor I'll see about you, you mutinous dog!"

"Aye, and I'm glad to go for'ard," retorted Barney. "As for coming to anchor, it 'll be a lucky man who sees this ship come to anchor!"

"What d'ye mean by that?" Lute stepped forward, his fists bunched, his knuckles white, his face a mask of bitter rage. "What d'ye mean?"

"What I say, and you can find the answer," replied Barney, and walked away.

He hurried to get his belongings out of his room, feeling truly relieved of a burden in being disrated. Had not the girl been on board he might have felt entirely happy. Captain Lute looked far less content than the officer he had disgraced.

In the forecabin Barney expected to have trouble. It was scarcely to be avoided; but his recent handling of the boatswain had given him a prestige not to be ignored. All the unpleasantness that arose was by way of clumsy sarcasm, sneers, and evil looks. The men let him see plainly that while he was with them, he was not of them.

When he had spent one watch below in the rolling discomfort of a falling calm, he felt glad that he could never be of them. They talked of the ship and the captain, as their kind will. Barney had no right to resent it. He knew that, and so did they; but it almost made him choke to hear the sort of things they said. Had he been aft, an officer, when a man uttered such sentiments in his hearing, there would have been another flattened nose, if no

worse. Now he tried not to hear. It was all he could do.

The leak increased. The light breeze dropped. Old Lute grew savage as the evening crept on.

"Double up on the pumps!" he roared. "Set three gangs, and keep her going all the time till she's free!"

He took the boatswain aft, and made him an officer. All through the night he took star sights. Barney noticed him from his place at the pumps. There was such a frenzy of anxiety in the old man's position finding that it seemed as if he was in search of a sunken treasure.

At the same time, he would not have a windmill rigged to take care of the leak. That puzzled Barney. It set him pondering over many things; but his job was to put his share of brawn into hard labor, and he did his work at the pumps as scrupulously as he had done his duty aft.

"Come on, boys—a song helps!" he urged.

There being no response except a curse, he courageously set the example for them to follow if they would:

"Oh, seven long years I courted Sally—  
Way, hay, roll and go!  
She called me slowcoach dilly-dally—  
Spend my money on Sally Brown!"

No one joined in the chantey, nor did the pumps gain on the leak. Men pumped for two hours, snatched food from the miserable wreck of a galley, and slept where they dropped. In their spare moments they hauled the yards for every fleeting air that blew.

"Let him rig a windmill!" they said, and shouted it, too.

"I'll have no windmill. Pump!" the captain retorted.

There was rum aft. The second mate had some. The boatswain had too much, and so did the steward. The men saw it, and grew sore.

Barney awoke from a fitful sleep in the coil of the fore brace, vaguely aware of trouble. There was a great moon, lacking a day of full, and it shone straight into his eyes, blinding him for a moment. Then he was on his feet, running aft. Men were fighting on the poop, snarling like wolves.

Others ran aft with Barney.

"Come on, mate! Let's jump the dirty old dog properly now!" panted in Barney's ear. "This is your pie, too!"

"I think you're right!" snapped Barney, and leaped for the poop ladder ahead of the man.

Midway up the ladder he turned and kicked out, and the man tumbled to the deck, lacking interest in further events.

Barney made out something of the trouble, by sound and sight. Old Lute battled alone—that was clear. The second mate was there, but standing aloof. The boatswain was there, making a great talk to the men, who were mobbing and pounding at the captain. Bits of panting expletive jerked out the men's grievance. It was mainly about the pumping and the rum. The skipper, it seemed, had beaten a man with a belaying pin for demanding both rum and a windmill as an alternative to the men refusing duty.

"Here's Read! Let him have a wallop at the old stiff!" a sailor roared, stepping out of the mob and shoving Barney in.

Lute was bleeding from a dozen bruises. His eyes flickered out from among the thudding fists and lit upon the man whom he had disgraced before all hands. Fear clouded those evil eyes for an instant.

In a swift, searching glance Barney saw the pale, wide-eyed face of Muriel at the chart room porthole. The doors had been shut, and a man stood at each. No chance for Lute to dodge below, for shelter or for a gun.

The mutineers fell back to let Barney through. They had treated the disgraced mate as mutinous sailors would be likely to do, but now they saw a tremendous chance to look on at the settling of a score between the broken mate and the man who broke him.

"Sock it to him, Mr. Read!" they yelled.

Lute, stumbling on shaky knees, blinded with bloody sweat, facing the inevitable end, seemed to bow his gray head in despair. Barney faced him grimly. In the flooding moonlight he swiftly sought a weapon.

The man standing by the companionway door on that side gripped a fourteen-inch brass belaying pin like a club. He grinned expectantly. All hands had piled upon the skipper and hammered him; but when the finish was in sight, every man of the forecandle gang preferred that some other hand should deal the final blow. Who better than the broken mate? He had a reason, certainly!

"Give me that!" snapped Barney.

He snatched the brass club from the man's hand and felled him with it. A growl went up from the mob. Then Barney attacked them like a fury. The brass pin thudded home on heads and guarding arms. Men fell down the poop ladders before the onslaught; but many of the men had pins, too, and numbers were woefully unequal.

The boatswain ran around, as soon as he realized the truth, to attack Barney from behind. Others rallied, until the battle surged back again, and Barney was forced against the chart room. Clubs rose above his head. A blow sent the captain to the deck in a heap. Barney's head rang under savage blows. The fight seemed over.

"Here, Barney!" cried a trembling, panting voice at his ear.

Through the chart room porthole, suddenly opened from inside, Muriel Grey thrust a pistol—Lute's own gun. As Barney's fingers clutched it, he knew that it was cocked for service.

There was no time for palaver. Barney fired, and the boatswain fell, screaming. The other mutineers fell back again.

A running figure came from the after companionway, and Muriel cried a warning from the porthole. Barney whirled and fired blindly, and the steward fell with a clatter of steel on the deck as his carving knife flew from his shaking hand.

The men huddled uncertainly at the ladder. The helmsman had left the wheel to see the fight. Now a breeze struck down, and the upper sails flogged gently. It was a moment to be snatched, and Barney snatched it. He ran at the men.

"Get to the braces! Brace her sharp up! Wheel there, bring her to her course! Jump, you swine!"

Men ran, cursing him and calling to each other that he was not the mate now; but Barney had a gun, and had been willing to use it. The braces were manned and the yards trimmed.

When the last man was off the poop, Barney brought the second mate to the ladder and threatened him with dire results if he did not hold the after part of the ship against all comers. Then he brought the girl out.

"Let's look to these men," he said, and knelt beside Lute.

Muriel knelt beside him, her face full of sweet concern in the moonlight.



"It was splendid of you!" she murmured. "After the way he treated you—"

"Nothing else to do. Don't imagine that it was any love for him," Barney retorted shortly, ripping away the shirt from the captain's throat to let him breathe.

In the midst of his examination, he could still find time to realize that the pumps were not working.

"Make 'em pump, mister, and see they keep pumping, unless you want to drown with 'em," he told the second mate.

Again the clank of the pumps rose harshly above the rising harmony of the moving ship.

#### IV

THE evil-looking old captain was battered so that it was dangerous to move him, but he was carried into the chart room while the boatswain and steward were overhauled.

The boatswain was cold, but the steward lived, and whimpered, as his kind will, instead of conserving his breath. The girl plugged the bullet hole in the man's chest, and he tried to look his thanks; but the grim, gasping old man on the settee kept his glittering eyes upon the steward, and seemed to attract him like a basilisk. The steward was powerless to ignore that gaze.

Barney glanced at the ship's position on the chart and then ran forward to take a sounding of the well. As he passed close by the men, the pumps clattered around furiously. They seemed willing to accept his resumption of authority.

But there was a grievous amount of water now. No amount of hand pumping could clear the ship or keep the inflow down for long. Many a long league lay between her and a harbor; and the breeze moved her but sluggishly.

He went over the log again. The day by day positions alone might give him some idea of his chance of getting the Yolanda to safety. The scrutiny was discouraging. The daily runs had never been good, because of the ship's faulty lading. Besides, he saw the entry in the log which told the official world of his own disrating for assault upon his commander.

For a moment he saw red. Then the girl was calling him to hear something that the steward was trying to say, and he went to her side. Old Lute hung over the edge of his settee, gasping almost as painfully

as the steward, but there was a metallic light in his fast closing eyes which focused upon the steward's face.

"I can't make out what he's saying," the girl whispered.

Barney leaned lower. Again the steward tried to say something, but as he looked up and met those evil old eyes above him, he sank back and died without saying it. Lute, too, sank back upon his pillow, cackling hoarsely, with a sort of devilish triumph.

"Will you take care of Captain Lute?" Barney asked. His lips asked that, but every line in his expression said: "Can't blame you if you won't!"

While the girl looked down shudderingly, the skipper cackled again, as if to say:

"You don't dare refuse!"

"Of course I will," the girl replied. "Since you saved his life, I can't do less than try to keep it in him," but even her sunny nature was not strong enough to make her appear in love with her task.

Barney went among the men. They looked askance at him.

"If you do your duty, men, I'll see that things don't go too hard with you," he promised.

"Can't do more than men's work," they grumbled.

"Do that, then—I'll ask no more," Barney told them, and went aft to sail his ship.

Hour after hour he watched the heavy swirling at the stern, which ought to have been a clean wake. Deeper and deeper the ship wallowed. He leaped among the pumping gang, shouting urgently for them to sing.

"A song doubles the gang, boys!" he told them, and made them follow him:

"Oh, Sally Brown's a Creole Lady!

Way, hay, roll and go!

I'll bet she's got a yaller baby!

Spend my money on Sally Brown!"

The breeze freshened before dawn, and the ship made a furious commotion in the water, without making much progress. Presently two royals exploded like both barrels of a gun going off at once. Men labored aloft to clear away the wreck. The ship could not travel fast enough to take up any of the strain on her bursting canvas. The other royal went while the weary men were still in the rigging.

"Why don't he take to the boats?" they whined.

"Four of you come with me, and we'll rig a windmill," Barney told them.

They went to work with all sorts of rod and wheel contrivances, making a forge and bellows, turning iron bars into cranks and bearings. By the middle of the forenoon they had set up the windmill, and the water gushed to its rattling clank.

"Hooray! That's talkin'!" they yelled.

When Barney took them aft and served out rum, they smacked their lips and gave him three cheers.

The breeze blew stronger. The morning was bright and sunny. The old ship wallowed no deeper, but she traveled no faster.

"How's Captain Lute?" Barney asked the girl.

"You ought to take some rest yourself," she told him. "All I can do for the captain doesn't take the horrid look out of his eyes. I'm not afraid of him any more, but I could hate him if he weren't so ill. Such evil eyes!"

"Don't worry about me, little lady. I'll have all the rest I want soon. Suppose you go to bed," Barney replied.

Neither went to bed. Barney sailed his sinking ship, because it was a sailorman's duty so to do. Muriel Grey stayed with her stepfather, because it was a woman's duty to relieve pain.

Meanwhile the breeze hardened—not to more than a fine sailing weight, but the windmill worked like two, dragging the water out of the old ship until she began to move fast once more, and Barney took heart anew.

"Come along, lads! Get the spare royal yard off the house and send it up on the main!" he roared.

While he did most of the work, men followed him, and the girl watched him with moist and glistening eyes. The yard was crossed, with the sail already bent, and Barney led the song that hoisted it:

"She's a fast clipper ship, and she's bound for to go!

To my way, hay, blow the man down!  
With the girls at the tow rope she cannot say no—  
Give us some time to blow the man down!"

"Damned if he won't get her home!" the men said as they went forward, no longer under the dreary burden of pumping.

Aft, the girl brought a hot meal into the chart room, and made Barney eat. Her

eyes were warmly glowing and her cheeks were flushed as she waited on him.

"You must eat and rest, or you won't get my ship into harbor," she said.

Barney looked up at her in quick surprise.

"Your ship?"

"Yes—" she began.

Lute made a queer noise in his throat. Then, outside, on the breath of a windy gust, the windmill carried away and went screeching and clanking into the sea, and the newly set main royal cracked and shredded the sky with ribbons of canvas. "You better take to the boats!" cackled Lute, in an ecstasy of evil triumph.

Barney leaped outside. The men were already milling aft, voicing their demand as they ran.

"Leave her! We can't do no more! We done all men can do!"

Barney, turning to the girl, saw that her eyes were wet.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "We're not more than sixty miles from a port of call for traders. There's no danger, in this sea."

"I'm not afraid," she said shakily; "but the ship's all I have. She's not insured, and—"

"I understand," Barney said, patting her shoulder, while he told Lute more than a mere glance ever told a man before; "but your life's not to be thrown away because you lose everything else. It's precious to—me," he finished with a rush.

He swung around as Lute cackled again in his evil way.

"The boats!" bawled the men.

The second mate stood by in futile helplessness. Barney, looking around, saw that there was no more to be done.

"All right!" he cried. "Swing out both lifeboats! You"—to the second mate—"see if you can find provisions for them."

Barney went for the ship's papers, and for the few things he needed to navigate the boats to safety. Muriel went with him. As they went through Lute's desk together, they found private papers among the ship's documents. Back in the chart room they rifled through them, while the men yelled impatiently around the boats. The ship lay with her main yards aback, dipping into the seas. The captain seemed to sleep.

"Thought you said she wasn't insured," said Barney.

"He always told me that insurance was too costly—the Yolanda was too old, or something. He's always sailed her for me since my father died. I'm not a very good business woman. Why, is she insured?"

Barney mutely showed her a full general insurance for a sum staggering to a plain sailor.

"And payable to him!" said the former mate.

Right there many things came to Barney's memory concerning the voyage—Lute's insistence on standing out to the westward; his refusal to rig a windmill; his relations with the boatswain and the steward. Now, as he turned around to look at the gaunt figure of the evil old captain, supposedly nigh to death, he surprised upon Lute's face an expression which said:

"Leave me behind if you dare!"

"No, old evil eye, we can't leave you behind!" he gritted. To Muriel he said: "Neither will we take him into the boats to rob you. We'll bring the ship in, and fool him!"

As he went about the business of forcing men back from boats already swung out, back to the dreary grind of the pumps, Barney had little doubt as to what the dying steward had tried to tell, or of the reason why Lute cackled so exultantly when the poor fellow died without telling. Worst of all was the grim suspicion that the old scoundrel had meant to leave his stepdaughter behind when he abandoned the ship, as he had planned to do. It was only the springing of a new and genuine leak that forced his hand. Barney believed that a hole had been driven through the ship's timbers, and controlled by Lute, from the beginning.

"You'll pump for your lives now, my lads! See here!" cried Barney.

He seized an ax and smashed in the planking of the boats. Then he drove the men to the pumps at the pistol end.

"Tell me where you made the leak," he demanded of Lute.

The old rascal grinned for all his pain.

"You do me wrong, mister. Better trust to the boats. I need attention. Don't mean to let me die, do you?"

"You'll die before I let you make a fortune out of Miss Grey!" Barney retorted. "At that, I'll save you, and the ship, too. Tell me where the leak is to be got at!"

"You have a wicked mind," chuckled Lute. "The boats! You can patch 'em."

Barney went along to the pumps. He told the men they were working for a lady, who would reward them for saving her ship.

"We'll do what men can do," they growled.

So they pumped her along. The breeze blew hard, and she began to labor. The men quit, and Barney sent them back with a bribe of rum and a promise of death if they refused to pump.

In the darkest hour before a gloomy dawn, when he reckoned that they were within twenty miles of a pleasant little island where broad golden beaches encircled a safe haven, he made the girl steer, and he and the second mate went to help at the pumps. Then, in the first gleams of real day, the girl cried out, and Barney ran aft, fearfully. The men again stopped pumping. The sea already washed through the scuppers whenever the ship rolled.

"Land! I see land!" cried Muriel excitedly, as Barney came up the ladder.

He turned to the men at the pumps.

"Just an hour more, lads! Just one hour for a lady!" he roared.

The weary men buckled to their job again, grumbling, but somehow dragging her through.

Barney ran into the chart room, for he needed to study the map of that island. Reefs and outlying rocks were plentiful. Old Lute watched him, saying nothing, but cackling dryly.

Barney gave the girl a new course, and the ship wallowed faster toward the land, now all green, pearl, and gold in the light of morning, with creamy surf all about its base, and birds wheeling over it. Even the second mate found his courage, and urged the men on. Perhaps the rum helped, but the bright sun, the balmy smell of earth and foliage, and the tang of weedy reefs did more; and, most of all, the approaching end of the Yolanda's terrible ordeal.

Barney stood in the door, midway of deck and chart room, conning the ship. The sea grew placid, and little birds settled in her rigging. Deep ground swells rolled her, and the reef surge staggered her.

At last she struck. She slid up a shelving, sandy beach and stopped with a shock that tumbled the men to the deck. They got sail off her, while a crowd of natives gathered to see.

Barney turned at a rattling cry from Lute. The old man lay writhing in some

awful paroxysm that looked like unholy joy.

"So you've lost her for me after all!" he croaked. "Now get me into the boat. I'll give you a present out of the insurance."

He gasped, clutched his throat, and broke out again; but few words could be heard above the crew's noisy mirth. The girl stood in the doorway with Barney, looking on in half pity.

"If you'd ha' looked in the lazaret you'd ha' seen where the leak is; but it's all the same now. Get me to a doctor. Where's Muriel?"

Muriel was in plain sight of him, but his eyes would not function. Barney stepped beside him angrily.

"And you let us kill ourselves pumping! Well, don't laugh yet! I haven't lost the ship for you—I've saved her for Miss Grey. When the tide leaves her, we'll soon see all about your nice little leak."

"Oh, Barney! Don't be hard on him," the girl said in lowered tones. "Look at him! He's going to—"

Lute frothed at the lips, still grinning. He tried to stand up, but pitched forward on the floor in some sort of fit. He was dead before they got him into a canoe.

On the following day the captain's body was buried by a missionary whom they found on the island. Then Barney reminded the girl that she was owner of the Yolanda. Her ship was beached, and was lacking both a master and a legal mate, since he himself had been disgraced and sent forward.

"You shall be captain, and engage your own mate, Barney. You told me that you have a master's license, and certainly you have been worthy," she said.

So Barney went to his job, with more than a hope that before they sailed he might have another job to give the missionary.

### THE GREAT ILLUSIONIST

YOUTH is the great illusionist  
Without which nothing can exist  
That's worth the labor and the fret  
Of showman or of marionette.

With youth, life is a vibrant thing,  
No matter what may guide the string,  
No matter what the music is,  
The song, the silence—hers or his.

Youth, with one eye upon the moon,  
The other squinting all too soon  
At prizes easier to win,  
Seems false, and yet stays true within.

So long as blood-red roses pour  
From youth's high hat, life can restore  
The garden of a trampled heart  
In almost every worth-while part.

Youth, and the pits of hell yield heaven;  
Youth missing, paradise wants leaven,  
And love that took whole years to flower  
Dies in the fraction of an hour.

Youth is a demon with a clutch  
More thrilling than an angel's touch;  
Youth is a god whose sleight-of-hand  
Wrings laughter out of No Man's Land.

Only the blindest fools have hissed  
At youth, the great illusionist  
Whose magic power breaks handcuffs, bars,  
And turns mere tinsel into stars.

This is youth's secret—life's a stage  
Where God grants youth to every age!

*Richard Butler Glaenser*



# Precious

HOW ROMANCE CAME TO JUNE HOLLOWAY, THE BELLE OF  
LAMPTOWN, EVEN IF THE MAYOR'S SON DIDN'T WANT  
PEOPLE TO SEE HIM TAKING A FACTORY GIRL HOME

By Dawn Powell

AT dusk Lamptown woke up. While Crestwood, the village proper, lapsed into a nocturnal hush, its factory section on the western hill stirred to life. Lamptown's flimsy gray houses—rows and rows of them—seemed to swell and become mysterious with the secrets of their lodgers. The six o'clock whistle inspired sixty gramophones to jubilation. By the time the girls from the lamp works reached their street of boarding houses, "blues" were splashing through parlor windows, weaving a jazz carpet to each doorway. Girls in chiffon gowns and satin slippers—the lamp workers made high wages and liked to show it—shrugged off the day's work to the gay music, and dreamed of unknown eager lovers, of incredible letters waiting for them inside, as they crowded into the gray houses.

Back doors now exchanged frying odors. A clatter of pans here was answered by a crash of dishes from a sister sink. A lull came while seven hundred girls concentrated on the business of eating; and then again the kitchen noises heightened heroically. There was a strengthening of the brasses as the rattle of knives and forks drowned out all else, and amid an odor of steaming suds sixty kitchens broadcast a mighty symphony of pots and pans.

Supper was over. Lights bloomed in upstairs windows. "Blues" again, and laughter on front porches. In the parlors tall, lean girls danced together, cheek to cheek, and forgot nine hours of packing bulbs in the cocaine of syncopation. Upstairs a new girl, fresh from some farm or neighboring village, leaned out of her window to look at the red glare above Crestwood's eastern hill—the red glare that meant romance, for here was the foundry

where Lamptown girls recruited suitors. There were fifty men working at the foundry—only fifty men to seven hundred girls!

It was Mrs. Nelly Langdon's luck to get the cream of the seven hundred in her modest boarding house by the simple method of charging two dollars more a week than any other landlady in the section. In return for those extra dollars the wise lady called supper "dinner," called Hamburger "Salisbury," and referred to her parlor—exactly like all the other parlors, even to the gilded burdock leaves and the horrific floor lamps—as the "drawing-room."

Nance Merton, chief of forewomen after twelve hard years at the factory, lived at Mrs. Langdon's, sharing the very biggest room with Liza Fry. Nance always went in for the very best, and Mrs. Langdon's had class. Mrs. Langdon was a lady. On the mantel of her drawing-room a silver-framed portrait of her brother, Valmar Hoffman, in the uniform of a midshipman, bore witness to her family blue blood. Girls who lost in the keen competition for a foundry beau, could look at Valmar Hoffman's picture and say:

"That guy wasn't the real thing, anyway!"

Even Nance, thirty, now, and factory hardened, could not look at the picture of Val without a tightening of the throat and a little twist in her heart. Nance knew that same tug at her heart when she saw Rudolph Valentino in the movies, or when, on a starlit evening, she saw little June Holloway, in organdie ruffles and white slippers, sitting on the stoop of the shabby cottage at the edge of Lamptown. June, daughter of Lamptown's scandal woman,

had been the pet of all the factory girls from her adorable infancy right up to her enchanting eighteen.

Sprawling her lean length on Mrs. Langdon's parlor sofa, Nance was waiting for June. After her day of helping her mother sew, June invariably wound up at Mrs. Langdon's after supper. Here she found excitement, gossip, and unflinching admiration, which she loved.

She was late to-night. Nance wondered why. Nance had always felt responsible for June. It was she who had arranged for piano lessons long ago, and had started June practicing religiously on Mrs. Langdon's tinny piano. It was she who had taught June to dance. It was she, in the very beginning, who had made the factory girls stand by June's mother in the face of all the gossip. They had made Mrs. Holloway the modiste of the district, bombarding her with their gorgeous brocades and fantastically patterned velvets.

It was Nance who saw that June went on all the lamp workers' holidays, who saw that she wasn't left out just because she was a baby. It was Nance who told June, when Crestwood school children whispered of her mother's shame behind her back, that there wasn't a girl in Crestwood—not even in the Country Club—who could hold a candle to Junie Holloway for looks. Yes, June couldn't have done without Nance, and Nance, for that matter, couldn't have done without June.

"Where's the kid?" Mame Delabaugh called from the front porch. "Did she leave my pink velvet with you, Mrs. Langdon?"

Mrs. Langdon, perspiring over the ironing board in the kitchen, shouted an inarticulate reply.

"Are you going to wear that pink to the Labor Day picnic?" Nance inquired, gazing at the parlor ceiling.

"Yeah," Mame's voice floated back through the open window. "It's my color, you know. Say, did you hear they're taking on ten new men at the foundry next week? They're getting them from that Ashland factory that blew up."

"Guess I'll take my green velvet over to Mrs. Holloway's to be made up," Nance reflected aloud, considering the possibilities of ten strangers in town. "Next pay I'll get gold cloth for scallops on it, and I'm going to get those little gold buttons to trim it with. Remember the way my pur-

ple chiffon was made—that one I gave to Junie?"

"Sure I remember, but she took the silver buttons and the red taffeta flowers off it right away and ruined the whole style of the thing. That kid's a scream!"

Nance smiled indulgently.

"Aw, she'll learn, Mame. What does a baby like that know about dressing? She always looks mighty sweet, though—you've got to hand her that. No style, you know, but sweet. For that matter, she could get away with murder, with that yellow hair and that face. Wonder what's happened to her to-night? I wanted to tell her she could go with us to the picnic, and maybe her mother could make over my tan silk for her to wear."

"Look all right on her. It's too dull for you, though, Nance. I never liked it on you." Mame leaned back in the hammock and dangled one foot lazily. "Say, Nance, you're right in there—put on that new record I got Saturday, will you? Guess it won't kill you to move."

Reluctantly Nance roused herself to motion. Languidly she cranked the gramophone. New dissonances troubled the air, mingled with a distant player-piano and innumerable other victrolas, and presently were lost in the tangle of "blues" that hung over Lamptown.

## II

Two respectable blocks east of the factory a neat little roadster slid to the curb. June looked up at Bob Nielan inquiringly.

"I'd take you all the way home, Junie," he said, awkwardly fumbling at the wheel, "but it's 'way after six, and all the factory people are out. You know how it is. I'd hate to have it get around to the folks that I was hanging around Lamptown."

June blinked, a little puzzled. Then her blue eyes widened in painful understanding.

"Oh!" she said, and was annoyed that her voice should sound so small and muffled. "I—I see. Of course!"

She collected her packages—the tangerine taffeta for Nance's new sport suit, the pink velvet with matching marabou for Mame Delabaugh, the two fashion magazines her mother had asked for—and conjured a smile. The blue eyes couldn't quite manage it, but her wide-brimmed hat disguised their failure.

Bob was reassured.

"You see, Junie, don't you? Working in the bank the way I do—father being mayor and all that—"

"Of course I understand," said June, looking away. "I guess it's mighty brave of you to drive me around town the way you do—just a Lamptown girl. A man has to think of things."

She got out, smiling quite radiantly.

"I don't care if you are!" Bob burst out, reckless under the spell of her smile. "You know you're different. You're not really Lamptown stuff, Junie, and I suppose you can't help where you live. Gee, Junie, you're so darned pretty! Look, are you going to the factory outing at Seymour Grove? I was thinking I could just happen to be there on Labor Day, and you could meet me some place around."

"I don't know. Perhaps," June answered in a low voice, and then hurried up the hill that separated Crestwood from Lamptown.

Once on Lamptown's cinder walk, she breathed more easily. This was where she belonged, after all. In Crestwood she must scurry along with bowed head, frightened of the whispers that followed her, of the low whistle that went around a pool room when she passed, of the insulting salutations from grinning men if she dared to lift her eyes. She bore a triple taint—the taint of Lamptown, of her mother, and of her own unholy loveliness.

The only time she dared to be proud was when Bob Nielan took her home in his roadster. That had happened four times, and Junie had almost felt that she had conquered Crestwood; but now—

"He's ashamed of being seen with me," she thought miserably.

It was worse than if he had never noticed her at all. As she started down the street of gray boarding houses, she felt that something beautiful had suddenly turned hideous. To be, as Bob had told her, the prettiest girl in town, and yet to have people afraid to be seen with you!

Then the jazz-weighted air subtly revived her. She saw girls waving to her from porches, and she waved gayly back. Here in Lamptown they loved her and were proud of her. If she had never met Bob Nielan, she might have been happy always, ignorant of the taint she bore. Here were hush and peace in the daytime, while she and her mother sewed, and here at night were laughter and excitement—an excite-

ment that mounted weekly until it broke out into a carnival or such a holiday as the Labor Day outing.

At Mrs. Langdon's June stopped. The girls were all in the parlor, dancing; but Mrs. Langdon's voice, speaking from the kitchen to Mame Delabaugh in the dining room, rose above the saxophone's squeak. June stopped, with her hand on the porch rail.

"Bertha Holloway's not bad, you know, Mame—never was," Nelly Langdon was saying. "She just got so sick of Holloway high-hatting her about his family all the time that when this other guy came along she just didn't care. You can't blame a woman. Then, when Holloway found out and raised a fuss, folks around Crestwood took their own polite way of stoning her. It just broke her. She can sew like a streak—thank God for that, I say!—but she's a little cracked just the same. Standing down there in the freight yards this morning, waving to the engineers and the firemen! Bertha Holloway isn't coarse like that, you know, or bad—just cracked."

"Well," Mame answered, "so far as what people say goes, I guess it's just about the same thing."

June closed her eyes for a moment. Half a dozen times she had fetched her fragile mother from the freight yards, but people hadn't known about it until now. No wonder Bob Nielan didn't want to be seen with her!

June went into the house, dropped her packages on the hall seat, and saw by the diamond-shaped hat mirror that she was pale. Nance would guess something was up. Nance always knew.

"Come on upstairs, honey," Nance called to her from the head of the stairs. "I was just getting out my tan silk to bring down, but you can come on up instead. Why, why, Junie, what's happened? Didn't Lize tell you we were going to take you to the picnic with us, and we're all going to have a swell time dancing in the pavilion? I was going to let you take my dress. Come on, June—tell Nance what's happened."

"Nothing," June gulped, and then tore up the stairs to Nance's arms. "Nance, Bob Nielan—you know who I mean—was afraid to bring me all the way home tonight for fear people would see him! As if I was bad, or poison, or—oh, dear, Nance!"

Nance led her into the big bedroom, clucking soothingly. Over June's yellow hair she looked somberly into space.

"It isn't you, Junie," she said. "It's on account of your mother, and on account of Lamptown. Crestwood thinks we're too cheap for white folks. Their girls would grab off the foundry boys fast enough if they could get them, but with us it's different. And you—"

June buried her face in the pillow.

"He was ashamed of me, Nance! And I thought he liked me. He told me he did!"

Nance's pale gray eyes narrowed. She folded her arms over her chest—an attitude which two dresser mirrors, duplicating, made impressive.

"Don't you think about the Nielan boy, June," she said slowly. "He's nothing—get that?—absolutely nothing. They think they're too good for us in Crestwood, honey; but do you know the way I feel? Why, I think that town is too cheap for us. I guess we dress snappier than any girls in town. Don't we make a showing on Sunday, when a bunch of us go out together in our good clothes? You bet we do. Why, we're too good for this one-horse town!"

June dried her eyes and stared at Nance doubtfully.

"The kind of fellow that I think about"—here Nance's face became soft, her eyes dreamy—"is so first-grade that he'd just laugh at Bob Nielan and those Crestwood folks. Hicks, he'd call them—hicks. He'd say to me: 'Those girls at the Crestwood Country Club are apple knockers, Nance. They don't know life. They've never been out of this town in their lives. They bore me. I like a girl who can dance, and who's worked all the time and knows life. I like a swell dresser,' he'd say to me."

Nance's bosom heaved a little under the green georgette, and her face, usually strong and hard, became softly flushed and radiant.

"June, I wouldn't tell this to a living soul," she said impressively; "but I'm just telling it to you so that you'll know enough to hitch your wagon to a star. The man I'm crazy about—the man I'm thinking about when I tell you all this junk—is that boy down on the mantelpiece in the navy uniform!"

Junie sat up in bed, wide-eyed.

"Valmar Hoffman!" she breathed.

Nance nodded.

"Valmar's who I mean—Mrs. Langdon's brother. He's a real fellow—a swell. He'd just laugh at that Bob Nielan, Junie; and about your mother, he'd tell them that's the way lots of society women act in New York. Junie"—Nance rocked back and forth in the ecstasy of at last confiding her long-hugged dream—"he's been all over the whole world—California and London and that Monte Carlo you read about—"

"Monte Carlo!" June exclaimed in awe.

"And Miami and Tokio and Cuba. He goes in society when he's in New York, too—night clubs and all the exclusive places. I read a letter he wrote to Mrs. Langdon. Don't you see, honey?—that's the sort of man to think about—the real thing. Crestwood isn't the real thing. It doesn't mean a thing when they snub you. Forget it. If you were in a big city, millionaires would be running in circles for you. Go home and look over those magazines. You'll see some man in there that would give his eye teeth to know you—Lamptown and mother and all. Think about him. Never mind how far away he is!"

June slipped off the bed. She came over to Nance and put her hands on the older girl's shoulders.

"Oh, Nance, I will—I will! You're right, I know. I'm so glad about you—and Valmar. Supposing he came here—why, you'd marry him, wouldn't you, Nance, and go away to Paris or some far-off place?" June clasped her hands. "Mrs. Langdon says he might come, too. He might come any day. Supposing he came this year—this summer—"

Nance stretched herself, and drew the softness of her mouth into more cynical lines.

"No telling, baby. I don't count on it, but I shouldn't be surprised. Run on home now, and tell your mother I want the neck kind of low—not too low, understand, but lower than this I have on. Take this tan thing and tell her to cut it down for you. With your big hat it'll look fine for the picnic. Night!"

June went downstairs. From the silence she knew the girls had all left to go down to the Greek's at the corner for their nightly fudge marshmallow sundaes. On the porch she heard a noise that might be Mrs. Langdon rocking.



June stood in the parlor doorway for a moment, looking at Valmar Hoffman's picture. His eyes were so jolly and keen that they drew her a few steps farther. Half hypnotized, she took down the picture and studied it. Yes, it was a handsome face, with something else, too—a kindness about the mouth, as if he would really understand about June, and about her mother waving to the engineers, and about Bob Nielan. A dear face!

"Bob Nielan!" June whispered fiercely. "Why, he's nothing compared to you! Nothing! You're real, Valmar!"

And then June forgot that he was Nance's Valmar, and kissed the picture—once—twice. Then, hearing a step in the doorway, she put it hastily back on the mantel.

"I say, precious!" a man's voice said gently. "Wouldn't you honestly prefer the original?"

In horror June turned around and saw in Mrs. Langdon's dreadful drawing-room a young man in a blue uniform—a young man with jolly, keen dark eyes and coal-black hair—a young man with a blue cape swinging from his shoulders.

"Oooh!" she choked. "You're—you're him!"

She stood paralyzed for a moment. He had seen her kissing his photograph—oh, shame, shame, June Holloway!

"Or, if you don't want to try the original," went on Valmar Hoffman with a broad grin, "you might at least be fair enough to exchange pictures with me. Where's Nelly? Didn't she get my wire?"

June's hand was clutching her throat. She made a wavering step toward him. Then she gathered courage, and, brushing past him, fled desperately out of the house. She ran down the cinder path without stopping until she reached the dark little cottage at the very end. Then, panting, she dropped on the doorstep, covering her shamed face with her two hands.

"Oh!" she panted. "Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

### III

NIGHT skies above Crestwood's eastern hill blazed more brightly. Girls from Lamptown came over to walk past the foundry, peering boldly through the windows at the men, shirtless, their bodies gleaming with perspiration, their eyes shining with reflected fire. They watched

breathlessly for furnace doors to open and the quick flare of crimson to light up faces.

Here, over in the corner beneath that whirring belt, was a new man. There, above that steaming pit, was another. Ten new men, and some one had said that all of them were single! For those ten men seven hundred girls would buy gaudy new ornaments, and on Sunday afternoons would parade in giggling groups past the foundry boarding houses in East Crestwood. Because of those ten men girls would fight savagely, and the ten winners would find themselves paying for each sheepish and perhaps temporary suitor with six hundred and ninety-nine sharp tongued enemies.

Only Nance Merton stayed at home and smiled with faint scorn when Lize or Stell would tell of the tall, blond man on the night shift—the one who came from Cleveland. It was true that her pay went, just as Stell's did, to buy new adornments; but Nance's were not for the foundry men. Hers were for Val.

"Think of it!" Nance said to June Holloway, one evening when June sat on Liza's bed, rather absently sewing on her tan silk. "That night when I told you about Val—the way I felt about his picture and everything—all the time he was on his way here. It wasn't ten minutes after you'd left this room before I heard Nelly Langdon let out a yell—'Val!—just like that, and there he was!'"

Nance paused for a moment and then went over to close the bedroom door. You never could tell whether the other girls were listening. Val himself might be downstairs in the hall, hearing every word.

Nance came back and sat on the bed beside June.

"Do you know what it is, June?" she whispered. "It's fate—that's what it is. Don't you think so?"

June's blond head bent a little lower.

"I—I guess so, Nance," she murmured.

"You don't think he's as handsome as his picture, maybe," Nance said tolerantly. "You act kind of funny about him. Maybe you think he's—well, a little snobbish."

"Oh, but I don't, Nance!" June protested. "I think it's wonderful that a man like that—so fine and used to society—should treat us as if we were just as good as he is. The way he takes the whole crowd down to the Greek's every night,

and over to Crestwood to the movies, letting himself be seen with Lamptown"—June caught her lip with her teeth—"when all the time the Country Club sends him invitations to come over there—Nance, I think it's splendid of him!"

Nance nodded with proprietary pride.

"I guess it shows up your Bobby Nielan, all right, doesn't it?" she said. "Look at Val offering to take the whole house to Columbus to a *matinée* last Saturday! Course, we couldn't go, but it was pretty decent of him; and he's as tickled about going to the picnic to-morrow at Seymour Grove as we are. Gee, June, I can hardly wait! Think of dancing with him in that swell pavilion to the music of that real orchestra—gee!"

June pulled the last basting thread from her tan silk, and stood up.

"Does that Nielan business bother you any more, June?" Nance asked gently. "You haven't been worrying about that, have you?"

June shook her head. She had seen Bob Nielan in town the day before, and he had told her he was going to Seymour Grove on Labor Day—"just accidentally," he had said, "and then you and I can meet off by the boathouse, maybe, and take a ride together. I'm crazy about you, June!"

June had neither consented nor refused—only looked a little wistfully into space.

"Everything's all right, Nance," she said.

You couldn't tell Nance that you wished she had never called your attention to Valmar Hoffman's picture. You couldn't tell her that the reason you weren't worrying about Bob Nielan any more was because you could think of nothing, night or day, but Val—Nance's Val. You couldn't explain that the reason you didn't come over in the evenings any more was that you adored her Val so terribly that you couldn't be in the same room with him without blushing ridiculously all the time. You couldn't say that you were ashamed to talk to him because you heard Nance tell him about your mother one night.

No, you couldn't say any of those things; nor could you confess that when the plunking of a mandolin floated to your ears—as at this very minute—with Val's agreeable barytone singing love songs, you felt you just couldn't bear it.

"Listen!"

Nance lifted a forefinger. Val was softly singing a romantic song:

"I'm dreaming of that night of love  
With you in Araby.  
I thrilled with wild delight  
A thousand times that night—"

Abruptly June got to her feet, and picked up her silk.

"See you to-morrow, Nance," she said.

"I'll go down, too," declared Nance. "I could die hearing him sing those songs about love! Think of having him look right at you while he's singing 'I love you'! Mame said he looked square at her last night, but I was there, and it was me he looked at all the time!"

They went down the stairs. On the porch the other girls were sitting raptly still. Val sat on the railing, leaning back against a post, strumming his mandolin. He was in his white uniform—Lieutenant Hoffman, the stripes meant, he had explained—looking incredibly handsome. Nance squeezed June's hand.

Val stopped singing the instant the two girls appeared. June, smiling a little shyly, started down the porch steps.

"Don't go yet, Junie," Liza called. "It's such a wonderful night, maybe we'll all go for a walk."

"Go ahead," Nance said coolly. "You all take a walk, and Val and I will stay here and sing."

But Val got up, his eyes on June.

"Let's sing later on, Nance," he suggested. "I feel like walking. I'll run home with precious here, and be back later."

June confusedly tried to protest, but he took her arm lightly and started down the path with her. She told herself it would be silly to argue, making much out of nothing at all; but she was afraid of him.

Supposing she should fall in love with him, the way Nance had—wouldn't she just be storing up unhappiness for herself? A man like Val couldn't have much to do with a girl who had June's inherited past. He might like Nance, because Nance had a good name everywhere, even if she was just a factory girl. Her people were honest farming folks. She didn't have to explain to any one about them.

Somehow they did not say a word to each other as they walked down the cinder path, past the empty lots sown with clover, to the dingy cottage at the very end. June hoped he could not hear her heart beating.

She wondered why he was so quiet with her, when he seemed so irrepressibly gay with the other girls. Maybe he was afraid of her, too, as Bob Nielan was.

At her gate they stopped. June held out her hand; but Val didn't go—just held on to her hand.

"You liked my picture better than you do me—isn't that so, precious?" he asked.

June mutely shook her head, remembering that horrible first meeting.

"But you're really horrid to me, you know," he reproached her. "I thought you—well, might like me a little after we met; but you run away every time you see me. It isn't fair—especially when I have to leave next week."

June looked down at the toe of her white slipper, and fumbled with the third ruffle of her lavender voile.

"Will you dance with me—just once, to-morrow, Junie?" he begged. "Don't you think I feel silly just looking at you and sighing, when you won't pay any attention to me at all?"

"I'll dance with you, Val, of course," June managed to say, and then they looked at each other and were breathlessly silent. He leaned slowly down to her upturned face. She felt powerless to draw back or to take away her gaze. He bent closer—their lips were barely two inches from each other. It was dreadful, June thought, to want some one to kiss you so much!

"Precious!" he whispered.

"I—I love to have you say that—'precious'!" June breathed.

The boldness of her own words alarmed her. She drew back quickly and rushed into the house, her heart pounding.

"It doesn't mean anything," she told herself. "He's Nance's Val. When he sings love songs, he always looks at Nance. He's hers. He's only sorry for me because Nance told him about me."

Her mother was sitting up in bed with a magazine.

"Look, Junie, isn't he handsome?" she said, pointing to a newspaper portrait of a motion picture star. "I was thinking I'd write him a little note to-morrow. He looks sort of familiar."

June ran a hand over her forehead wearily. She dropped into a chair and started to undress.

"I wish you wouldn't, mother," she said, but she knew it was no use, for her mother would write the letter.

June slipped off her dress and then grew rigidly still; for Val's voice came to her—Val singing as he sauntered back to Mrs. Langdon's boarding house:

"I'm dreaming of that night of love  
With you in Araby.  
I thrilled with wild—"

June closed the window.

#### IV

SEYMOUR GROVE had started out modestly as a place for fairs and carnivals. Then, finding itself the only playground for miles around with a pond to its credit, it began to take on airs and a reputation as a summer resort. It grew to be the Coney Island, in its rustic way, of all the neighboring villages.

On Labor Day the usual hordes of Sunday schools making holiday, of convening Elks and Odd Fellows, were completely lost in the avalanche of girls from Lamp-town. In gay silks, plumed hats, and jet-beaded slippers, they swarmed the rustic paths, shrieked on the merry-go-round, squealed on the Ferris wheel, and, in the desperation of having only one day to work in, made bold plays for the men everywhere. Men from the Crestwood foundry went about in protected groups. Short, stocky men they were mostly, wearing brown suits and derbies, and smelling of barber shops.

In the pavilion, Lize danced from ten until six with the tall, blond man from Cleveland, and Mame Delabaugh could flaunt a traveling salesman who was an indefatigable if awkward dancer. Val, with Nance on one arm and Mrs. Langdon on the other, promenaded over the grounds. Nance kept June on one side of her, and on Mrs. Langdon's other side walked Stell, not forgetting to smile faintly at any man she happened to meet.

At the boathouse two of the foundry-men, who had thus far escaped the head-hunters, were intrigued by Stell's scarlet satin outfit.

"Want a ride, girly—you and your friend?" they called ingratiatingly.

It was their bad luck that Mrs. Langdon should think herself the friend referred to, and with a self-conscious giggle follow Stell to the boat, leaving June with Nance and Val.

"It's Nance's only chance to have him alone," she thought unhappily. "I'd bet-

ter slide away somehow and let her have her chance. It wouldn't be fair to stay just because—because I like to be near him."

While Nance and Val were feeding the black geese, she hurried into the grove. She was running along blindly when a man's hand was thrust out to stop her. It was Bob Nielan. She had forgotten that he was to be here.

"I knew you'd come, Junie!" he exclaimed, squeezing her hand. "I've got the car up here, and we'll run away for a little while."

June hesitated. She wanted to be haughty—to hurt Bob as much as he had hurt her; but after all he did offer a means of escape from Nance and Val. Nance had to have her chance.

She got into the car beside Bob. She could swallow her pride for Nance's sake.

Two hours later, in the pavilion, Val deposited Nance on a rustic bench, thoughtfully near two young foundrymen who had been ogling her for some time.

"No use talking, Nance," he said, "I'm worried about Junie. Maybe she did give us the slip just for fun, but where could she have gone? None of the girls have seen her."

"She's all right," Nance said, tapping her foot suggestively to the fox trot just starting. "We might as well dance some more. She'll find us."

"No, I'm going to ease my mind by looking around the grounds for her," Val insisted. "A baby like that might get into all sorts of mischief. I'll be back."

Nance started to protest again, but one of the two men on the neighboring bench sauntered over to ask for a dance, and Nance forgot Val and June for some time.

Seymour Grove was larger than it appeared, and Val found that the search for June was not so simple as he had thought. It was almost five o'clock when he met Lize and was told that June had gone riding out on the Crestwood road long ago with some one. Frowning a little, Val engaged a taxicab and started out the same way. Half an hour later he came upon June sitting on a rail fence and swinging her leghorn hat, right beside a neatly upturned roadster.

"Junie, for God's sake, what's happened?" he shouted, clambering across to her.

"Waiting for the wrecking crew," June

half laughed, half sobbed. "Bob's gone to find a garage or something."

Val took both her hands and lifted her down. Anxiously he looked at her, but found no apparent injuries, though her eyes were suspiciously red.

"How did it happen, darling?" he asked, still holding her tight.

June gulped.

"Well, I might as well tell you. I was with Bob Nielan, and we were driving around, and everything was all right until a big limousine got in directly behind us, and Bob turned around and said, 'Duck down, Junie, for Heaven's sake—it's my folks!' And then he kept turning around to make sure they didn't see us, so when they passed he crashed right into this fence. Lucky they didn't see it happen!"

"But why didn't he want them to recognize you?" Val asked stupidly.

June looked down at Val's hands covering hers. Her lips trembled a little.

"He was ashamed of being out with the Holloway girl from Lamptown," she said.

What was probably some naval expression escaped Val's lips. He carried June to his taxicab and got in beside her.

"Lamptown," he instructed the driver.

All the way going back to Lamptown he looked so stern and forbidding that June was almost frightened.

"I did intend to come back—to dance with you," she ventured.

Then Val smiled, and squeezed her fingers tightly. It was dark as they drove down the cinder street of Lamptown. A moon was up, revealing the awful emptiness of the gray shells in shadow. No lights in those windows to-night, no tapestries of jazz to hide their bleakness.

The ugliness of the vacant lots near the Holloway house was mellowed by the darkness. Only the fragrance of dead clover swept up to the moon.

"I don't want to be going home," June sighed. "It's a night to be walking in gardens—with roses everywhere!"

Val abruptly kissed her hand.

"There ought to be roses somewhere around here," he said. "Stay here on your porch, and I'll hunt."

June waited on the dark stoop. Her arm had been wrenched a little in the accident, and now that Val had left her the pain of it came to her. She wondered what had happened to Bob—Bob, with a bleeding face and a broken finger; but some-



how she couldn't feel a bit sorry for him. And then Val was coming back, holding in his hand what seemed at first to be a diminutive tree.

"Look!" he cried triumphantly. "I found a rose bush growing in the lot over there. I dug it up with my hands. See—I'll plant it right here at your doorstep for you to remember me by!"

"I would be happier if I forgot you," June said in a low voice. She watched Val tearing at the earth with his bare hands. "You'll get your beautiful uniform all dirty," she told him.

"As if that mattered!" he retorted. "There, precious—our rose bush!"

June looked at it, her hands clasped. She almost expected roses to bloom on it immediately, so much faith had she in Val's magic. She knew that he was taking her hands in his, knew that in another moment he would kiss her. She tried to think of Nance, to remind herself that this couldn't possibly mean anything. She tried to command herself to refuse him her lips.

They kissed.

"Junie, you precious baby! God, you are lovely!"

Then he was gone. June dropped to the stoop, stunned with her own disloyalty. She looked at the rose bush.

"Oh, Nance!" she whispered. "I didn't mean to—I didn't mean to at all!"

## V

NANCE found out. Mrs. Holloway told Mrs. Langdon, when the latter asked why June stayed away. For two days Val had been moody and silent. He went down twice to the Holloway cottage, and both times Mrs. Holloway said June was ill and could see no one. It was the automobile accident, Mrs. Holloway said.

The third evening Nance and Val were left alone on the porch.

"I guess you'll be pretty glad to leave this town," Nance began self-consciously. "So would anybody that's used to big cities. I guess sailors have a sweetheart in every port, don't they?"

"Not if they've got good sense," Val answered, a little preoccupied. "The real sport is in keeping from having a sweetheart in any port. That takes brains, my dear Nance!"

"Well, I guess it was pretty easy not to fall in love in this cheap town," Nance

pursued, carefully smoothing out her handkerchief. "Nobody here you like, is there?"

"Why, Nance, that's nonsense!" Val protested, his eyes on the road leading to the Holloway house. "I like all of you girls. Nelly Langdon will tell you. I was just saying the other day that I loved the whole lot of you. You're—I don't know—well, splendid. You, too, Nance. I was thinking of you especially."

"I like you too, Val," Nance offered radiantly.

"Mighty glad to hear it. I'll be looking forward to seeing you when I come next year." Val got up and gave a last look at the road. "Think I'll go upstairs and write some letters. Night!"

"You wouldn't like to sing something, would you, Val?" Nance pleaded. "Something kind of sad?"

Val picked up his mandolin, twanged a few chords idly, and then, with his eyes fixed on the western cinder path, began to sing:

"When the dawn flames in the sky,  
I love you—"

Nance was so moved that she had to get up and go into the house. There Mrs. Langdon stopped her and whispered that she thought Val was really gone on June Holloway. He acted so funny, and then giving her that rose bush and—

Nance waited for no more. Her strong face colored darkly, and her eyes flashed. Val was still singing as she tore down the path to the Holloway house. At the gate she called June's name peremptorily. June appeared at the window and then, looking a little wan, came down to meet her.

"Listen, kid!"

"Yes, Nance?"

Something in Nance's voice warned June that this was no friendly call.

"I just came to tell you that I'm through with you—see?" Nance's voice was low and menacing. "I just heard about your double crossing me—you trying to vamp away the only man I ever was crazy about! Sneaking around him, when you knew he liked me! When—oh, Lord, isn't there one white woman in all this damned town?" Nance's voice became strident with suppressed fury. "You, June Holloway, would try to get my man from under my nose when I've been good to you—"

"Oh, you have been good to me,

Nance," June sobbed. "I didn't want to—"

Nance brushed her protestations aside with a fierce gesture.

"Don't try to get around me with that! I know you now, you little traitor! He thinks you're just a baby—that's why he's nice to you; and you try to take advantage of him, asking him for roses!" She wouldn't let June speak. "After I wheeled you up and down this street when you was a kid, bought you your first set of furs—white ermine, it was—took you to dancing school and paid for it myself—taught you to shimmy—haven't I been like a mother to you, June Holloway? Answer me that!"

"You have, Nance—you've been wonderful," June wept. "I didn't ask him for the rose bush at all, and I promise never to see him again—honest, Nance! You're more to me than anybody else. I couldn't help myself liking him. He only gave me the rose bush to remember him by."

Nance swooped fiercely on the tiny bush, yanked it up by the roots and flung it as far as she could.

"There!" she raged. "Remember me by that! Maybe it 'll teach you to be square with your friends!"

She whirled around and ran back up the road. June, her arm across her hot eyes, stumbled into the house and up the stairs. Outside the bedroom door she drew a deep breath for strength to face her mother.

Mrs. Holloway, with faintly flushed cheeks, was writing a letter in bed.

"Junie, do you know what I'm doing?" she demanded excitedly. "I'm writing to your father's people out in California that we're coming out there to visit next month. They've always been nice—and just think, we'd be right near Hollywood! You'd like that, wouldn't you, Junie? You know Lamptown's no place for a nice girl like you, Junie. You don't belong here."

June looked at her mother drearily.

"I don't belong in Lamptown and I don't belong in Crestwood. I guess I don't belong anywhere, mother."

Mrs. Holloway stabbed a pen in the ink again, unheeding.

"We could sell the house, you see—"

June didn't feel that she could bear more. She went to the little front room and looked out of the window. Blindly she saw a red glare in the sky above Crestwood's eastern hill. Ten new men at the foundry—a hundred new men—what did

it matter? She wasn't really Lamptown, so it spelled no magic letters in the sky for her; and in Crestwood men would rather risk death than be seen with her.

"I'll never see Val again," she thought, "and Nance will never be my friend any more!"

She heard a new "blue" waver uncertainly from the boarding house on the other side of the lots; then a sister gramophone hastened to join it. The girls were getting back from the Greek soda fountain. On Mrs. Langdon's porch they were planning new gowns for the factory Hallowe'en dance—brocaded georgette, chiffon, and gold cloth.

Through the interwoven gramophone sounds June heard a voice. Val must be singing on Mrs. Langdon's front porch. Still, it sounded very near:

"I'm dreaming of that night of love  
With you in Araby—"

A pebble tinkled against the window pane. June started.

"Precious!"

He was down there somewhere in the darkness. June steeled herself.

"I—I can't come down, Val. You—you'll have to go away, I'm afraid."

"Come down, precious!"

"You don't understand, Val. I can't. I promised—"

"I've just seen Nance, if that's what you mean. It's all right, darling. Come on down! She understands now."

Uncertainly June came down the steps. She had scarcely reached the door before his arms were tight about her.

"I couldn't go away without you, precious," Val was saying huskily. "Will you marry me, Junie—to-morrow? Next day? And go away with me forever and forever?"

"To-morrow," June answered faintly.

Hours later Liza Fry stirred in bed and then leaned resentfully on one elbow.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't stay up all night, Nance Merton," she said petulantly, "with that light shining right in my eyes! What in Heaven's name are you doing with that old lace?"

Nance seized a newspaper and jammed it over the light, then picked up the pile of white lace again.

"I'm making a wedding veil for Junie," she stormed. "Now will you shut up?"

# Horatio Hopkins Himself

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE, TELLING HOW A YOUNG MAN BROKE AWAY FROM THE DULL ROUTINE OF AN OFFICE DESK TO FIND ADVENTURE AND ROMANCE AMONG THE REMOTE ISLANDS OF THE PACIFIC

By Leslie Burton Blades

THE morning was cool and clear—a gay spring morning full of the ineffable spirit of romance and strong with the tang of the sea.

Horatio Hopkins, stenographer and filing clerk for the firm of Stoddard & Stoddard, importers, alighted from a street car, crossed the Embarcadero, and came out upon Pier J. The little man was clad in a proper business suit and rather pointed tan shoes. His thin, clean-shaven face habitually wore a placid expression, but the wistfulness haunting his large, deep-set eyes betrayed a restless spirit long restrained.

Among the heaped up crates and boxes on the pier, Mr. Hopkins halted. The mixed smell of spices and perfumes was pungent in his nostrils. Queer Oriental labels fraternized with bold American goods. Horatio's expression underwent a transformation. A smile brought color to his lips, while a certain eager zest brought an almost boyish look to his face. The wistfulness yielded to a suggestion of a sparkle and the shadowy forms of dreams.

Touching the great boxes with intimate friendliness, Horatio moved among them until he could see out across the bay. Moored to the pier lay an old three-masted schooner, her maze of spars and tangled stays flung into the cloudless sky.

"The Marinello!" Horatio rolled the melody of her name hauntingly.

A swarthy foreign sailor came along the wharf, carrying a parrot. He placed the bird on a high box, snapped a light chain around one of its legs, and fastened the other to an adjacent crate.

Horatio waited decorously until the dun-

garee-garbed stranger retired. Then, approaching the parrot, he ventured timidly:

"Hello there, Polly! Polly want a cracker?"

The bird regarded him noncommittally. Horatio moved nearer and repeated his inquiry in a coaxing tone. His effort provoked nothing but disdain. He walked around the box, admiring the parrot's brilliant green and yellow plumage. The bird became suspicious and turned warily, his shining little eyes watching the antics of this circling fellow.

Horatio took a step nearer and again repeated his solicitous query. The bird cocked its head on one side, scrutinizing him intently. Horatio decided that the look must be friendly, and extended a venturesome finger. The parrot darted forward, and its beak drove maliciously at the intruding hand. Horatio drew back, thrust the offending member into a pocket, and regarded his treacherous assailant ruefully.

"You're a snob," he said.

The bird flicked its gorgeous tail.

His voice carrying an undertone of resentment, Horatio reiterated his question, as if he thought it important to get a definite answer:

"Polly want a cracker?"

There was a flurry of fine feathers, and the parrot advanced belligerently.

"Polly want a cracker, hell!" he squawked. "Who do you think I am?"

Dismay was written large on Horatio's features. He stepped back hurriedly and glanced behind him to make sure that no one had witnessed this rude rebuff. Reassured, he treated the offense with a shrug, and sauntered toward the schooner.

Her lacy rigging drew him with mesmeric power, and the open hatches beckoned darkly. In that mysterious interior he visioned long crates containing enormous bunches of red and yellow bananas, boxes of aromatic tea, rich silks, or mounds of ivory. A nameless impulse gripped him. He clambered hastily aboard, assumed an air of careless interest, and, crossing the deck, leaned upon the farther rail.

Habit impelled a look at his watch. Half an hour remained before he must appear behind his desk. He put the timepiece back into his pocket, and bent his gaze deep into the sunlit blue of the water.

The soft slap of the ripples against the schooner's hull translated its rhythmic sound into a chant of distant lands—a challenge to adventure. Before Horatio's eager eyes arose the vision of a remote island, a glistening white beach, the fronds of coconut palms, long native boats drawn out of reach of the breakers, and brown-skinned peoples dancing before bamboo huts to the plaintive, passionate music of primitive instruments.

The offices of Stoddard & Stoddard withdrew into a remote chamber of Horatio's subconscious mind, and were presently forgotten. The firm's most expert stenographer vanished from reality, and in a brooding dream Captain Horatio Hopkins stood upon his own ship.

The distant music of the native revelers wove a provoking pattern through the mariner's thoughts. Why was it he could thus be troubled because a rascally crew fell into sullen ways? Suppose they had mutinied, and were delaying his departure! Captain Horatio clenched a courageous fist. That brawling Yankee wastrel should learn obedience!

There was a step behind him—a stealthy tread just audible above the lap of waves and that confounded music. The treacherous second mate about to attack him. So it had come to this!

Captain Horatio whirled to drive a fist full into the stomach of the swarthy fellow who was almost upon him.

Ephraim Hunt, second mate of the schooner Marinello, promptly clapped a hand to his outraged abdomen, choked, and ejected a sizable quid over the rail. A look of vague regret that he bestowed on the departing quid was replaced by a belligerent expression.

"Say!" he said, eying the horrified Ho-

ratio with growing disfavor. "Say, what in the blue blazes is comin' off here, anyhow?"

The late captain of the Marinello shrank before the wrathful gleam in Mr. Hunt's gaze.

"I—I thought you were the second mate," he stammered, hypnotized by the sight of Mr. Hunt's hamlike fists.

"I am," that worthy stated succinctly. "What of it? What of it, I say?" he repeated, his voice rising.

He advanced a step. Horatio retreated hastily, moistening his lips as he forced out the first words that occurred to him:

"I—was looking for a job."

The astounded second mate halted and expressed his bewilderment forcefully.

"Lookin' for a job! Say, do you always start in like that?"

His incredulous gaze wavered from the little man's gray fedora down the crease of the neat trousers to the pointed tan shoes.

Horatio heaved a sigh of relief. He felt emboldened now that the critical point had passed. Here, at last, was his chance to strike up an acquaintance with one of those wandering heroes whose deeds fired his dreams!

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I was thinking deeply, and you startled me. Would you shake hands?"

Mr. Hunt was strangely touched by the evident worship in the wistful dark eyes that regarded him so seriously.

"That's all right, son," he said, and engulfed the extended hand in a mighty paw. "If you're lookin' for a berth, we need a steward for the skipper's mess."

Horatio trembled with suppressed excitement. Here was the golden opportunity! He visioned himself swaggering down the queer, twisting streets of far-away cities, chucking dimpling barmaids daringly under their firm little chins, and combating the machinations of swarthy-browed villains in the search for treasure-trove. He expressed as much to Ephraim Hunt in halting, glowing words.

The practical-minded mate snorted disdainfully.

"I've sailed salt water for fifteen years, and all I found was work. Wait till you've pounded through a gale in the forties, with tons of water swashin' over the deck! Boy, when you've starved in an open boat for weeks, like I have, an' fought pirates off



the Malay Peninsula with a slab-sided crew of drunken swabs, you'll learn sailin' ain't shore leave—it's work!"

Horatio's flushed face and dancing eyes radiated admiration.

"My sainted aunt!" he breathed, resorting to his superlative ejaculation, and a short, excited laugh escaped his lips.

Ephraim Hunt warmed to the response of his audience. The yearning and respect with which the little man gazed up into the seaman's angular brown face touched him pleasantly. His toleration ripened into friendliness.

"Work, an' plenty of it—that's all it is," he stated firmly.

"I'll tell the world!" Horatio vociferated. "Real work!"

"Still, it ain't so bad, neither," mused the second mate. "You learn to like it. The sea gets in your blood."

"Old salt to the bone," murmured Horatio, and added explosively: "You bet I'd like to try it!"

"Well, the steward's berth is empty. If you want to fill it, I could get you signed on for a voyage."

The mate's appraisal of Horatio's slight figure carried a challenge. The little man's restless spirit leaped toward freedom, but escape was not so easy. Before his mental gaze arose the picture of an office door marked "private." It opened, and from beneath shaggy brows the eagle eyes of old Junius Stoddard bent upon him sternly.

"I'd lose my job," he said aloud, "and I've had it seven years."

Within the second mate there stirred to life the heritage of a Puritan ancestry.

"It does a man good to break loose sometimes," he said. "Layin' up too long at one dock gives the barnacles a chance to gather on you." A massive thumb and forefinger tested the size of Horatio's diminutive biceps. "A year at sea would make that arm fit to give a real punch to the stomach," he declared, and large amusement shone in his smile.

Horatio's spirit tugged convulsively at its restraining bonds. The spark of an idea glowed through his brain with tantalizing warmth. His breath quickened.

"What's your name?" he asked of the seaman, evading the issue by a question.

"Ephraim Hunt. You needn't worry, lad—when I say a thing, I do it. That's Ephraim Hunt, second mate of the Marinello!"

"I'm Horatio Hopkins."

"One name is as good as another," the Yankee summarized with doubtful gusto. "The thing that counts is the stuff in a man."

"I'll tell you!" Horatio rose to the tremendous challenge in this last remark with a trace of desperation. "I can't say positively before lunch. I have to notify the old man first. It wouldn't be the square thing not to. If you'll meet me at noon, we can lunch together, and—"

He could not formulate the momentous conclusion of his thought.

"All right, son," Ephraim agreed heartily; "but you'll have to say then. The Marinello sails at sunup to-morrow!"

## II

THE metamorphosis which, following prohibition, had transformed the Golden Frigate from a saloon to a restaurant had failed to eradicate its earlier personality, long dear to seamen. The lunch counter stirred tender memories of a bar, and the tables succeeded in suggesting that their presence was an inarticulate protest.

At twelve o'clock Ephraim Hunt led Horatio Hopkins thither. The second mate rolled through the swinging doors with truculent joviality, but not even the broad good humor radiated by the hull of that marine leviathan could dispel Horatio's gloom. They took a table at the rear. As the rosy-cheeked waitress paused beside them, Ephraim rested one hand on the cloth, elevating three fingers in a peculiar manner.

"Coffee," he ordered, "and beefsteak, rare."

The girl smiled and nodded, and the three fingers descended.

"It's all off," Horatio resumed his interrupted discourse sourly. "I never got a chance to explain, let alone to ask old Stoddard for leave. He wouldn't give me time to explain."

"Well, now," Ephraim drawled, "that's too bad. Cut your pins from under you before you got safe on 'em, did he? I knew a whaling captain like that. I didn't like him, either. First time he put in to shore I jumped the ship, and there I was, flat broke on an island where there wasn't a white man, and no other berth in sight. That was on Madagascar."

The waitress placed the coffee before them. Ephraim raised his cup.

"Nothing better than shore coffee to be had these days," he lamented; "but we can drink to luck with it, I guess."

Horatio took up his cup, touched it to Ephraim's, and drank. A puzzled look crept into his face, but he said nothing. He was too polite a man to comment on a friend's peculiar taste in coffee.

"Drink it down, lad," Ephraim exhorted heartily. "You'll take it easier when you get warm inside. First thing I always do for sorrow is to stow a good meal aboard. Ballast makes it easier to ride a storm."

The girl approached with the steaks. Ephraim raised his fingers, and the empty cups were replaced by full ones.

"Yes, sir!" Ephraim was loquacious. "Steak helps, too. When you get to sea, you won't have good beefsteak like this—not regular, anyhow."

"But I told you I couldn't go." Horatio was inclined to vent his disappointment in irritability.

"So you did—so you did," the second mate responded. "It's a pity, too—Captain Hardman kind o' wanted you."

Horatio gulped this information silently, along with the contents of his second cup. A soothing warmth spread through him amidships, and instead of a retort he nodded sympathetically.

"Indeed!" he said. "Sorry, but I can't oblige."

"That's all right." Ephraim accepted his friend's regret generously. "I knew you was a chap with decent feelin's. Still, it's too bad. Looks like we'll have to sign on a regular he sort of seagoin' steward, which ain't what we want."

He caught the eye of the waitress and motioned toward the cups. A third steaming draft was disposed of while he talked on in rambling fashion.

Horatio listened with increasing zest. Color returned to his cheeks and deepened till they glowed. His eyes began to shine. Ideas came less and less reluctantly, each with a richer tint than its predecessor, until he found himself nodding enthusiastic agreement to Ephraim's remarks or pondering with profound solemnity on some cryptic statement.

"South Sea Islands are South Sea Islands, I can tell you," the second mate observed; and from that philosophic introduction he spun a tale of life and love. "She was as brown as a tarred rope, that

girl, and glossy like a ripe banana, but I had to leave her—had to!"

Horatio wiped the tears from his compassionate eyes and mumbled incoherent words of pity.

Ephraim beckoned the waitress.

"Just keep the cups full, lass," he said, when she stood beside him.

A slow, deliberate wink accented his order. Horatio watched the heavy lid descend with fascination.

"What makes your eye go shut that way?" he interrogated in awed tones.

"That?" Ephraim ruminated darkly.

"Well, sir, that's a habit I got once when I was shipwrecked on an island where there warn't a living creature but a lot of sleepy sea lions. Got so used to watchin' them that my own eye got affected. Never been able to stop it since."

Horatio found this tale so humorous that he fairly rocked with laughter. His eyes poured streams of merriment down his cheeks. An overwhelming sense of his own robust manhood mastered him, and under the necessity of promulgating it to the world his tongue wagged its owner's sacred opinions.

"A man oughtn't to stick too long in one job. It makes him forget his freeborn right to independence. I tell you, mate, he gets into a rut—a trough, I mean."

Ephraim stared at his companion. His boyhood memories centered around a Massachusetts farm, where ruts were conventionally acknowledged to be proper to such a figure, whereas troughs—still, he was not one to dispute superior education.

"I'll tell you—" resumed Horatio, talking loudly.

Ephraim rose.

"Time to move along," he said. "Come and have a last look at the Marinello."

"Last?" Horatio gasped, and an abysmal grief yawned in his breast.

"That's right—last look—good old—last look!"

His arm locked in Ephraim's for support, he rolled beside the second mate toward Pier J, gained the ship, and went aboard.

Half an hour later he rose from a table before which Captain Hardman sat, and between them lay a paper to which Horatio had affixed his signature. He was sleepy. Ephraim Hunt led him tenderly to a berth, helped him into it, with "Good night, my hearty," and left him.

Horatio closed his eyes, nor did he open them again until the *Marinello* was well out at sea.

### III

UNDER full sail the *Marinello* rolled to a heavy easterly swell, plowing out her foamy path across a billowy blue field.

For three days Horatio was absorbed in an intensely personal matter. In the end the stubborn rhythm of his digestive system surrendered its last disputed claim to the conquering motion of the vessel, and harmony reigned once more. On the fourth morning he assumed his duties as steward.

His memory of the circumstances under which he came aboard remained persistently obscure. When he asked Ephraim Hunt to clarify the matter, that solemn Yankee spat overside.

"I'll tell you, steward," he said at last, with utter gravity. "My recollection is, you walked."

The thought of Junius Stoddard's reaction to his abrupt departure from his job troubled Horatio, but this problem was effectually shelved, at least for the present. He refused to think about it, substituting more pleasurable fancies concerning the curious conjectures and perhaps the tender recollections with which his office associates and the people at Mrs. Bindle's boarding house were discussing his mysterious disappearance. By the end of the week he was genuinely elated with the turn life had taken.

At Honolulu Captain Hardman advanced him some money, and under Ephraim's able supervision he purchased suitable clothing for the voyage.

The *Marinello* was headed for the Samoan Islands. Trampling down the swells beneath her prow, the vessel spun their sun-pierced foam into miraculously rainbow-tinted bubbles which floated back along her sides. The billowing canvas glistened overhead.

At evening the sun, hung on a level with men's eyes, spread a broad path of purple across the glassy sea, and a brilliant day gave place to a gorgeous night. Stars pierced the azure heavens with their silver beams, and phosphorescence turned the vast ocean into a rolling world of magic fire.

Bearded, tanned, and with new life dancing in his eyes, Horatio rode the bowsprit, thrilled by the splendid grace of his ocean

charger, or, lying drowsily on deck, dreamed magnificently of the future. It was not as steward that he meant to ship next time.

"No, sir—before the mast, you bet—regular first-class seaman!"

"Look alive there!" Ephraim Hunt's booming voice shattered the midnight reverie and startled Horatio to a sitting posture. "What in blazes?" The second mate dropped on the hatch beside him. "I caught you fair this time, steward—dreamin' about them brown-skinned girls, I bet!"

"I wasn't," protested Horatio, feeling his cheeks flush.

"Well, then, why wasn't you?" demanded Ephraim. "What do you think the Almighty gives a man this kind of weather for?"

Horatio considered.

"I don't know," he said.

"Neither do I," confided Ephraim, and silence fell between them.

Horatio scented a yarn. The night invited confidence, and the mate was never without a personal narrative.

"Those girls you mentioned," he suggested thoughtfully.

"I didn't," defended Ephraim. "You was dreamin' of 'em."

"What do they look like?" asked Horatio.

"They look like women," the second mate replied tantalizingly.

He was too good a Yankee to give away anything that another really wanted. He filled and lit his pipe.

Horatio took offense at this rebuff. He stood up.

"After midnight," he said curtly. "Time for me to turn in."

He moved along the deck.

Ephraim blinked in amazement. His impassivity disappeared.

"The South Sea Islands are full of 'em, all shades and sizes," he said hurriedly.

"Women?" inquired Horatio scornfully.

Ephraim didn't seem to remember that he had been two months at sea. He was no office clerk. You couldn't treat a seaman that way. "Women are the same the world over," he continued. "Not worth losing one's sleep to talk about 'em. Good night, Mr. Hunt!"

He strutted proudly off to the forecastle, leaving the second mate, who had anticipated his company through the watch, to smoke alone.

Unable to believe his senses, Ephraim waited a few minutes, with a tolerant smile on his lips, for the steward to return. At last, however, chagrin overcame him. He got up hurriedly, strode to the rail, and spat disgustedly.

"The tray carryin' land crab!" he muttered. "Walked right off and left me, proud as a skipper! I'll teach him to show me his blasted pair of heels!"

Anger smoldered in his eyes, and his lean jaw closed firmly.

A sailor lying unnoticed beyond the hatch rose and stretched lazily.

"Good night, Mr. Hunt," he said, imitating Horatio, and hurried forward, grinning.

The brickish color of Ephraim's features deepened to crimson. He whirled as if to halt the seaman, but thought better of it, and stood still, scowling angrily. Before morning the crew would be stealing covert glances at him and poking one another's ribs. More than once he had intervened between them and the steward, and now they would know how to repay him for spoiling their fun. He paced the deck moodily.

At breakfast Captain Hardman's stern expression yielded to a suggestion of sardonic humor.

"Women," he remarked to the first mate, "are the same the world over, I've heard."

"The colonel's lady and *Judy O'Grady*," murmured Mr. Brown, showing an unexpected literary flair.

Ephraim kept his gaze on his plate, and his epiglottis worked convulsively.

"I don't know that I agree to that," pursued the captain conversationally.

"You take brown-skinned ones—"

"Oh, them!" said the first mate. "They're different, of course, on account of being all shades and sizes."

Ephraim choked on a spoonful of oatmeal. Captain Hardman became solicitous.

"You aren't looking well this morning, Mr. Hunt. Your appetite is bad, too. You're not feeling under the weather?"

"Too much salt to this food," mumbled the second mate. "I don't have a taste for stale things. I like something fresh."

The first mate took a mouthful of oatmeal and tasted it reflectively. Captain Hardman watched, awaiting the officer's verdict with elaborate interest.

"Seems sweet enough to me," declared Mr. Brown at last. "Never tasted better."

"I thought so, too," agreed the captain. "Perhaps the steward spilled a little salt in Mr. Hunt's plate. I'll have to warn him to be careful about that."

A violent fit of coughing attacked the second mate. He rose and left the mess.

The cook appeared, beaming affably. He was a little man with salt and pepper hair, a nose the color of a small beet, a pair of ample chins, and a body resembling a bell, on short, waddling legs.

"Good morning, Mr. Hunt!" He paused, and his eyes swept the sea. "A fine day, for sure—makes a man remember old times in the South Sea Islands."

Ducking hastily into the galley, he closed the door behind him.

The man at the wheel wiped his mouth to conceal a smile. Mr. Hunt glowered and strode aft, where he brooded somberly.

#### IV

WITHIN an hour every man on board knew that Ephraim Hunt had withdrawn his protection from Horatio. There were whispered consultations. A spirit of mystery pervaded the vessel, and the steward became uncomfortably conscious of covert, amused glances. At noon the cook blocked the galley door with his rotund body while he surveyed Horatio pitiingly.

Disturbed by the conviction that he was the object of a conspiracy, Horatio spoke irritably.

"What's up, anyhow? Tip me off, can't you?"

The cook rolled his head from side to side and assumed a melancholy expression.

"I can't," he said. "I haven't the heart, steward. It's too bad, too awful bad! I've took a likin' to you, and I can't speak the words."

He pretended to wipe tears from his eyes with his chubby fists.

Observing the signs of unwonted activity, Ephraim forsook his chill austerity and invited Horatio aft to smoke. The steward made a show of carelessness.

"Something's brewing in the fo'c'stle, Mr. Hunt," he drawled casually. "I wonder what it's all about!"

Ephraim ruminated, gazing with a mournful air across the sparkling water.

"Steward," he said at last, with dolorous relish, "if I was to tell you, you'd jump overboard, and I'd have to rescue you."



Providence never meant a mortal to foreknow his fate, and that's Presbyterian truth. What would you think of me if I was to go against the ways of Providence?"

His somber gaze shone with pious resignation. The unctuous commiseration of his voice and the droop of his gaunt figure made Horatio think of an exultant yet foreboding raven.

"I'll tell you this," he croaked, and filled a brief ensuing pause with sinister portent. "Captain Hardman's decided to stop at Tonakua for water. We'll be there by to-morrow mornin'."

"Tonakua!" echoed Horatio awesomely.

The second mate nodded.

"Tonakua," he said, as if uttering an unhallowed word. "Blackest island in the Marquesas, steward."

The coloring Ephraim gave this information imbued it with unmentionable meaning, and, like a witch's shadow, obscured the present peace with psychical foreknowledge of impending evil.

Horatio stared fearfully. A shiver passed through him. His cheeks changed color, and he asked in subdued tones:

"Is it the people?"

"Yes, the people," echoed Ephraim in a hollow voice. "None of your light-lovin' women on Tonakua, steward, but creatures—that's the name for 'em—creatures!" He paused, seeming by the convulsive movement of his facial muscles to wage an inner struggle. At last he added, as if driven to speak by the horror of his knowledge: "I've seen things before, and I know what I know. If I'd 'a' known we was to stop at Tonakua, I'd never have let you sail this voyage—and that's straight, as I'm a Christian!"

Horatio exerted his manhood and contrived a dry, incredulous laugh. Ephraim grasped his hand and wrung it warmly.

"I give you my sincere wish that fever strikes you or you get killed from a coconut fallin' on your head, steward. We've been true friends, so I hope that for you."

The second mate turned away, overcome by emotion. Horatio wandered aimlessly about the deck. Never had the sparkling surface of the blue sea shone with such magical suggestion of unending life, or the arching sky appeared so wholly lovely.

When he served the captain's mess that evening, the steward's hands were not quite steady. The first mate watched him place the dishes on the table without attempting

to conceal his lack of confidence in their safe arrival. Ephraim murmured, as if he did not wish Horatio to hear:

"Tonakua's sendin' out the spell. I've seen it work that way before."

That night Horatio's sleep was disturbed. Again and again he awoke with a start from vaguely alarming dreams, and was relieved to feel the vessel's even roll. Toward morning he became oppressed by a heavier atmosphere, and perspiration stood out on his body. An impulse stronger than his will drew him to the deck. Somehow he was confident that he could face the Marinello's arrival at Tonakua more calmly if he watched the island from the first moment of its visibility. He rose and left the forecabin.

Dawn came at last, but without the roseate brilliance of preceding days. No sweep of golden lances plunging from the newly risen sun struck the rolling water into a field of sapphire. Instead, far to the north, a somber continent of cloud heaved from the surface of the sea, piling its cliffs and broken peaks against the darker heaven. From it, like the smoke from a volcano, there drifted down the eastern horizon a screen of haze, through which the morning light shone ash yellow.

The sultry wind increased in force, edging the transparent waves with irregular lines of foam. Under billowing sail the ship plunged to a strong ground swell as she raced ahead. The straining rigging answered the wind's bass with a tenuous, high-toned melody, through which the lookout's voice rang sharply:

"Land ahead, sir!"

Forward half a dozen seamen echoed:

"Land! Tonakua!"

Some of the crew hurried to the rigging, in obedience to Captain Hardman's orders. The deck was vital with activity. Sails were clewed up, water barrels were placed in the boats, and finally the anchor was dropped. Horatio was oblivious to it all. Before him shone a magic land whose dulllest mood undoubtedly surpassed the most extravagant of his dreams.

A coral reef girdled the island, and against it the waves broke in a shower of spray. The air was tremulous with the mighty yet somnolent chant of the ocean swell. On the nearer side the girdle broke, as if Tonakua had slipped the clasp to form an opening for smaller boats from vessels too large, too coarsely mundane, to

rest upon the ambient blue waters of her calm inner sea.

A broad white beach sloped gently to the hem of the island's forest gown. Beyond it was luxuriant vegetation, with enormous blossoms of crimson, purple, white, and golden yellow hanging in clusters from the tangled vines.

Inland rose a solitary mountain, its precipitous face hidden beneath a dense forest. From below its lofty summit a brightly gleaming band of silver marked the course of a stream to a point where, falling in a cataract over a rugged cliff, it became lost in the jungle.

As Horatio gazed, fearful, enthralled, possessed by strange excitement, a score of long canoes shot from the invisible mouth of the stream into the smooth lagoon. Sturdy brown savages, naked save for the red and yellow scarves wrapped about their bodies, began a chorus of welcome as they bent to their paddles. Emerging from the forest, a band of women watched in motionless absorption.

The first mate's voice aroused Horatio.

"Hey, steward, you'll go ashore in Mr. Hunt's boat. Step lively there!"

"Go ashore?" echoed Horatio.

His eagerness momentarily gave place to nameless dread, and then returned more vigorous than before. How good it would be to feel the earth under his feet again! He scrambled into Ephraim's boat. Oars dipped, and they were moving from the Marinello's side.

A moment later the native canoes drew into a double line, through which Ephraim steered.

The natives raised their customary greeting:

*"Kaoha! Kaoha! Kaoha!"*

To Horatio the word was awesome. What dark meaning did its melodious syllables hide?

They passed the reef and glided swiftly to the shore. A group of laughing girls flung off their scarves to dash into the surf on either side. The boat's prow crunched against the sand. Two men leaped out and dragged it out of the water. Eager, bright-eyed women laid hold to help them.

Horatio was the last to leave the boat. He kept close to Ephraim, but all around him were the graceful girls. They took flowers from their hair and tossed them with bursts of glee into Horatio's tense face.

"Here you, steward!" Ephraim bel-lowed fiercely. "You got no time to flirt with them daughters of Jezebel! There's a storm brewin'. Get hold of one of them kegs and hustle for fresh water!"

Flaming with embarrassment, Horatio reached for a cask. He would have lifted it and fled, but a woman sat on it. Others completely surrounded him. A score of hands caught at his arms and spun him around. A looping creeper was thrown over his head and swiftly wound about him.

Horatio's face was swollen, his eyes blazed. He shouted imploringly to the second mate:

"For God's sake, Ephraim, Mr. Hunt, get me free! Don't let them—"

Perceiving the object of the prisoner's frantic gestures, a dozen laughing girls encircled Ephraim. He was overwhelmed with creeper lassos. Brown hands, strong and dexterous, checked his efforts to escape. His roars of profanity evoked gales of laughter. Jostled, patted, encircled by dancing women, he was crowded to Horatio's side.

"What's the game?" he bawled. "Hey, Sam, you gawkin' lump of cuttlefish, come take 'em off of me, can't you?"

The sailors stared at him and at one another. Groups of girls with daring, laughing eyes flitted warningly between them and the captives.

"Yes, sir," said Sam reassuringly. "We can, sir, but if we do they'll tie the rest of us."

"You get us loose!" thundered the second mate.

Horatio hung his head and kept his eyes shut, to exclude all sight of the lithe brown figures shamelessly dancing around him. There were but few men in the crowd of natives, and the women seemed to be in complete control of the situation.

"They won't do nothin' to you, sir, except to take you to the pool, maybe," Sam volunteered. "I'd advise goin' quietly, sir;" and he retreated hastily before an advancing group of girls.

"You'd—" choked Ephraim, turning purple. "I'll teach you to—"

He could not continue. A double ring of women half dragged, half pushed him and Horatio toward a path which vanished in the trees.

Ephraim bent his furious gaze upon the steward.

"A pretty mess you've got me in," he growled, "havin' me pushed and hauled by a pack of naked females! I won't stand for it, I tell you! It's against ship's discipline. Mutiny, that's what it is! If you know what's sensible, you'll have 'em turn me loose!"

Horatio stared speechlessly. On either side tall palms rose straight and verdant. Ahead wound the darkening path.

"I—I—" he said, and lapsed into silence. What was the use of talking?

### V

THE capture and abduction of two members of the ship's company did not come as a surprise to the crew of the *Marinello*.

In the old days mariners landing on Tonakua were subject to attack by cannibal bands. Later, however, the natives enacted the capture as a symbolic representation of their friendliness. Girls replaced warriors and flowering vines the native thongs. After an hour or so, the captive was returned as a hostage and purchased by his captain with gifts of cloth and beads.

Aware of this custom, the crew, prompted by Ephraim, had planned to capitalize Horatio's ignorance for their amusement. When, however, without being aware of his triumph, Horatio succeeded in involving the second mate, the pleasure of the crew knew no bounds. They found unlimited joy in the Yankee's discomfiture, and set to work to fill the casks in high good humor.

Time passed, a storm was threatening, and Captain Hardman was anxious to get his ship to a safe distance from the reefs about the island; but the second mate and the steward were still missing.

The first mate went ashore in a small boat and penetrated the forest to the pool where, on earlier visits, the ceremonial prisoner had been taken. Not only was the shadowed river without human visitors, but the ground showed clearly that no one had been there that day.

To attempt a search was utterly useless. No one knew which trail to take of the many that led inland. Returning to the ship, the first mate reported his failure.

Captain Hardman paced the deck in perplexity.

Between two bands of naked captors Ephraim and Horatio tramped wearily

across a shoulder of Tonakua's peak. The storm had burst, and around them the forest rocked to the stupendous blast. Now and again the natives, their gayety quenched in the pouring rain, joined in a mournful, wailing chant, which rose to a high note and was sustained until it seemed that the spirit of the island shrieked in answer to the tempest.

Horatio tried to speak, but his trembling jaw refused to produce more than an unintelligible stammering. At last he managed a brief question:

"What 'll they do with us?"

"How do I know?" roared Ephraim. "This ain't anything like they ever did before. I hope they cut you up and make bacon out of you—that's what I hope!"

"It would be easier to salt you down," rejoined Horatio with spirit. "You're pretty well soaked in brine already."

Ephraim consigned his companion to a warm habitat, but drew closer for the comfort of his presence. They blundered on again in silence. The storm was still heavy when the party descended a slippery trail and halted at a group of houses. Their shouts were answered from within, and a moment later, dripping like sponges, the travelers gathered around a fire.

The natives were less somber now. Gathered close to the crackling fire, the few men in the party talked earnestly. From time to time they turned to look at the captives. Evidently they were discussing plans for some event in which the white men were to play an important part.

The women came and went, some preparing food, others industriously working at mats of grass and garlands of creepers. Their glances mocked the silent prisoners, and occasionally a whisper from among them caused a titter of subdued merriment to ripple down the room.

Ephraim stared into the fire, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge his appreciation of an environment which baffled his knowledge of island life.

Horatio watched and wondered. Somewhere in the inaccessible obscurities of his mind was a tantalizing conviction that this scene, and the events which had brought him into it, should be familiar. The garlanded thongs with which they had been bound, the mournful pilgrimage across the rain-swept peak, the mystery of brown-skinned peoples against the flare of fire, and the concentration of those around him

upon plans that were beyond possible discovery—all these were like vague fragments of a past experience or a forgotten dream. What made it all seem like part of a once vital knowledge? Above all, why was it so easy to forget his fears?

Prompted by such feelings, he leaned close and spoke to Ephraim.

"I ought to understand this," he stated offensively. "Why can't I remember?"

Mr. Hunt subjected him to a bitter glance and spat ferociously into the fire.

"Why can't pigs fly?" he demanded, and hastened to answer his own question. "They got no wings. They never had 'em—that's why. You didn't know that, I guess."

His haughty retirement into silence emphatically marked the termination of all conversation so far as he was concerned, but Horatio was not the man to wrestle with mysterious feelings in solitude.

"Pigs!" he said scornfully. "I know lots about 'em. They eat swill!" The mate's baleful look would have blasted a lesser soul, but Horatio weathered the glare and added stubbornly: "Who cares about your pigs, anyhow?"

This was too much for any self-respecting seaman's disposition. Mr. Hunt sat up abruptly, and, waving his arms, vehemently addressed the room.

"Look here!" he boomed. "You naked beggars take this thing away from me! I'm blowed if I'll have torture added to the outrage I'm already sufferin' in Christian virtue!"

The natives stared uncomprehendingly. Their silence and their glances assured the second mate that they were willing to regard his declamation, but could not comprehend his request. One of them indicated his desire to have the white man's wishes reexpressed in signs.

"I don't know your dirty hand talk," Ephraim thundered.

The hospitable native undertook a series of eloquent gestures involving his entire anatomy. The second mate groaned.

Horatio studied the gesticulating figure before them, eager to interpret these energetic movements. Their meaning remained hidden, however, and at last he turned to Ephraim.

"Speak gently to him," he suggested hopefully. "Your noise makes him go around too fast, I think."

Ephraim's swarthy face grew puffy.

"You hold your tongue, or I'll cut it out!" he boomed, and began a malevolent search through his pockets for his knife.

Horatio shrank within himself, and, moving away from his associate, stared moodily at the fire. There wasn't much use trying to be helpful to a man like Ephraim Hunt. Bullying crews on sailing ships had blunted his sensibilities too much. He was little better than a brute.

"All the same," the little man muttered, so that the words reached Mr. Hunt's red ears provokingly, "I do know what all this means, if I can just find it out—I know I do!"

Food was distributed by the women, and the captives were generously served. During the meal the natives laughed and talked volubly. Ephraim and Horatio were silent.

The night advanced, and one by one men and women lay down on mats to sleep. Ephraim and Horatio sat opposite each other. Neither spoke.

## VI

MEANWHILE the Marinello, having been forced to put to sea, was blown helplessly farther and farther from her course. Already Tonakua lay more than a day's sail behind her, and the gale showed no indication of abatement.

By daybreak it was evident to all on board that the second mate and the steward were on Tonakua to stay for some time. If the schooner rode out the storm—which at times seemed doubtful—it would be a serious task to get back to the island and institute a search for the captives.

Ephraim Hunt's long experience of the sea told him just what had happened. When dawn came without a change in the storm, he was plunged into a melancholy so profound as to touch Horatio's easy sympathies.

As for Horatio, his nocturnal vigil had reaped a rich reward. He felt sure, now, that he knew the meaning of his strange mood of the evening before, and inwardly he was exultant. Outwardly, however, he was a blank, for with the discovery that he understood the action of the natives had come a strong conviction that it would be better to hold that knowledge safe in his own head. For, Horatio argued with his conscience, the second mate certainly displayed an ugly humor, and a little man



possessing knowledge is often stronger than a big man who lacks it.

"Yes, sir!" he said aloud. "Knowledge is power!"

Ephraim was stiff, sore, and unreasonably convinced that Horatio was the cause of his discomfort. He was disposed to eliminate his fellow prisoner from his environment; and since this was physically impossible he resorted to psychic exclusion. For eight hours he neither saw nor heard the steward, nor did he speak a word, while his sullen bearing gave every indication that his mind had experienced a dark change, making him incapable of perceiving a fellow countryman anywhere.

Horatio endured the forenoon splendidly. The afternoon was not without its trials, and as a second night of rain drew down knowledge seemed valueless unless it could be proffered to a friend in the hospitable name of companionship.

"Ephraim," he said tentatively, over their evening meal, which both ate with openly sour faces, "if you had my education, you'd be better off. You'd know what I know. I'd give it to you if I could, but you aren't the sort of a man that could take education."

Mr. Hunt turned slowly toward the speaker. His gaze searched the space occupied by Horatio as if seeking to determine whether any material object was to be discerned there. Then, slowly, they withdrew, and the second mate shook his head sadly.

"Yes, sir," he mused audibly, "I'd give a lot to have one white man here. It wouldn't be so bad if I had somebody to talk to."

He bowed his head.

"You see," Horatio continued, "I've studied these natives all day. That's why I didn't have time to talk to you. I was studying, and I've figured it out. They've come up here to have their festival of fire. I know all about that. When I'm at home, I frequent the libraries of our city. I'm a student of foreign lands and customs."

Mr. Hunt turned toward him again. There was a look of honest wonder in the second mate's eyes.

"I swan!" he began, but at that point his memory awoke.

He had heard tales of the festival of fire. Of course that was what this gathering meant; and, as he realized the truth, his gaze turned to derision.

"We-e-ell now," he drawled, "if that ain't wonderful! It takes real education to know a thing like that, don't it? And it's mighty helpful, too, ain't it? Yes, sir—I never heard a thing so calculated to help an honest second mate get to his ship what's blown away in a storm!"

Horatio felt his stomach tremble and diminish. His face turned pale.

"You see"—Ephraim imitated the steward's tone—"there ain't a sailor in the world that don't know that, and all of 'em would agree that knowledge of it was mighty helpful to a pair of men as didn't care a rap for festivals, and only wanted to know why they was held prisoners and how to get away. There ain't any knowledge more helpful to a man in that fix than to know that these here devils have fire festivals!"

His conclusion was punctuated by a supreme exhibition of expectoration. Thereafter, his back remained immovably opposite Horatio's face.

Ephraim was right. Only two questions were important to them—why were they here, and how were they to escape? Upon these issues the particular type of native festival in preparation shed no light at all. The more Horatio pondered over this, the more clearly he perceived it, and the realization pained him unaccountably.

Toward evening of the third day the rain stopped. The wind was still, and the last rays of the setting sun lay water-jeweled and tender across Tonakua's brow. Then purple darkness clothed her in silent mystery.

Ephraim emerged from his protracted silence, and, drawing close to Horatio, spoke in lugubrious tones.

"Steward," he asked with mournful foreboding, "do you know what's come to me?"

"No!" Horatio's tone confessed sensing imminent horror.

"All afternoon one of them brown ladies has been hangin' close around. Remember?"

Horatio did. A lump filled his throat.

"She kept a watchin' you." Ephraim laid a hand on Horatio's knee. "Maybe she wants to marry you, steward."

The second mate was silent for some minutes. Horatio sat immovable. Before his mind arose the image of the native girl. She had watched him closely, her teeth flashing in occasional smiles. Three days

had accustomed him to the presence of the lithe if ample figures about him, but his imagination saw them in fresh perspective now. His tongue felt dry and thick. His forehead was damp and cold.

"Ephraim!" he managed at last, faintly. "Ephraim, we've got to get away—to-night!"

"Where?" The second mate sounded hopeless. "This is an island. How we goin' to get anywhere?"

How, indeed? Horatio surrendered to despair. To live forever with a robust young savage on this benighted island! The adventurers of a century had written of these women. There had been romance in reading about them, but Horatio did not understand their language. He was alien to their souls.

"God!" he whispered through dry lips. "It's too much, Ephraim. They're savage!"

"Yep, they are," Ephraim agreed with solemn consolation. "I knew a sailor that tried to live with one of 'em. She bit half his ear off just for a little tender play."

Horatio spent a feverish, unhappy night and rose with dawn, pale and disconsolate. At breakfast Ephraim's gaze was darkly comforting. Whenever Horatio looked at the second mate, he felt a touch of sympathy, and his lips trembled despite his will.

Now that the rain was over, the natives were like children released for a holiday. Activities connected with the ritual of fire were hurriedly commenced.

Sitting disconsolately on the edge of the broad stone platform before the house, Ephraim and Horatio watched. Each was a prey to every conjecture that ignorance of these primitives could stimulate, and each secretly worried lest his fears should be suspected by the other. One fact was clear to them both—as the morning progressed, the natives became more excited. Neither of the white men commented on the situation, but toward noon they drew together till their shoulders touched. There was comfort in that contact, anyway.

The real meaning of the entire episode was utterly beyond the imagining of either Ephraim or Horatio.

Ostensibly the people of Tonakua were Christian. Under the kind but austere shepherdage of the Rev. Joseph Blakely, they sought diligently to follow the narrow path that would, he assured them, bring

them safe at last to his white man's heaven, where they would be washed whiter than snow. Such an ambition required the suppression of a good deal, but they held to their purpose fairly well as long as Mr. Blakely was on Tonakua. When, however, that good man decided to make an evangelical survey of neighboring islands and revive his flocks there, the people of Tonakua felt that they were on holiday. With all the enthusiasm of mischievous children, they devoted the period of his absence to performing as many ancient pagan rituals as they could.

By evening the excitement reached a state of general exaltation. All preparations were made, and to-morrow the ancient ceremonial of the fire festival would be enacted. The natives turned unanimously toward the white men. Ephraim and Horatio turned toward each other.

"Steward," the second mate said emotionally, "it's come!"

"What?" Horatio gripped the outstretched hand and held it. "What, Ephraim?"

Mr. Hunt's head moved slowly from side to side. His jaws worked deliberately.

"Don't know," he pondered. "Wouldn't try to say." After a moment he added: "I keep thinkin' of my old dad's farm in Massachusetts, steward. I'd like to feed dad's pigs again, like when I was a boy. I did wrong to run away to sea, and I hope I'm forgiven!"

"I know!" Horatio nodded sympathetically. His throat was contracted, and, despite clenched teeth, his lids flickered several times suspiciously. "You never was the kind of man to desert your own folks."

Ephraim withdrew his hand a trifle hurriedly. The steward's sympathy affected him strangely. He would have answered, but the natives put an end to the conversation.

A young girl stood before them, laughing shyly. Her coquettish glances and embarrassed smiles betrayed her modest emotions. In words which neither understood, she began a chant, accompanying it with movements of her outstretched finger, pointed first at one and then at the other.

Horatio followed the girl's finger breathlessly.

"God, mate!" he breathed at last, in an agonized whisper. "She's finding out which one of us goes first! That's what she's doing!"

"Well, steward," replied Ephraim, "there's ships that flies the Stars and Stripes as needs my services. Our country needs me, steward, so it's only my duty as makes me wish she might take you."

Before the second mate's noble devotion to his country Horatio was speechless. Besides, the maiden suddenly stopped her chant, and simultaneously her extended finger moved forward, resting significantly against the steward's forehead. There was a flurry of excited voices. Girls swirled around Horatio, and he was carried bodily into a small house near by.

Here he was deposited gently, and the giggling captors retired, closing the door, which was bolted after them. Horatio was alone.

An hour later two men appeared, silently spread a sleeping mat, served him with food, and left the house.

Not until they were gone did Horatio decide to speak, and then, although he shouted repeatedly, no one seemed to hear. He gave up in despair and sat down to eat. During the rest of the night he sat disconsolately, wondering what had happened to Ephraim Hunt.

## VII

DAYBREAK came, and presently the sounds of people told Horatio that the natives were abroad. Through a chink in the wall he saw them laying fires. Tales of their cannibal past returned to him, and he sat in a cold perspiration, his eyes glued to the chink through which he felt he was to look his last upon the world.

Toward the middle of the morning a group of women approached the solitary captive. He saw them coming, and shrank from the chink to the far corner, but there was no escape. The women entered, and, surrounding him, began with purring noises to rub his head and neck with a sweet-scented oil. Horatio bore this trying ceremony with stoical disregard.

When he was suitably prepared, they took his arms and walked beside him. Thus he passed from the prison house of fire festival bridegrooms to an open space outside, where he found Ephraim Hunt. The air was filled with a slow, tremulous chant that throbbled mysteriously from scores of dusky throats.

Horatio bore himself bravely until he stood a few feet away from Ephraim. He was easily within that seaman's range of

vision, but Mr. Hunt felt that the proper angle for the gaze of a modest man devoted to his country was downward. He did not look at his fellow captive.

A fierce anger possessed Horatio. Halting abruptly, he whirled upon the second mate and began in clear, emphatic tones to speak his mind. A series of gestures accompanied his words.

The natives watched spellbound. Then, suddenly, they seemed to grasp the meaning of the vehement orator. A toothless old woman, tattooed from head to foot, stepped out from among them. She walked toward Ephraim Hunt, and as Horatio watched he saw a score of other women, young and old, surround the second mate.

Mr. Hunt was instantly and vitally aware of Horatio's presence. He glared ferociously at the steward and at the women around him.

"What—the—" he roared in true seaman's style. "Steward, you ain't got so much as the soul of a snail, you ain't! Why can't you go and roast in peace, if these savages can eat you, instead of draggin' me into things for the sake of your talk, which is insultin' anyhow?"

"Ephraim, I didn't get you into it," Horatio protested. "Honest, I never did!" As they were pushed along, accompanied by the women who clung to them, he added: "I didn't, Ephraim, but, when you come to that, shipmates in trouble ought to roast together, oughtn't they?"

"Shipmates!" Ephraim boomed. "You land crawlin' snip of a typewritin' eel!" He halted stubbornly, facing the old woman, who grinned excitedly at his side. "Where we goin'? I got to know before I take a step more—see?"

The old woman understood him perfectly. She could have answered in fair pidgin English, had she chosen; but she only pointed to herself and to him, and then turned and directed his gaze to a group of fires.

Ephraim Hunt emitted a roar, and turned to run, but he was seized by as many women as could find place to grip his arms, legs, and body.

"It's no use," Horatio informed him sadly. "We've got to go through with it, Ephraim!"

The titters of the women were an offense to the prisoners' ears, but they pretended not to hear. Similarly, they assumed an elaborate indifference to the increasing ju-

bilation among the comparatively few native men who took part in the proceedings.

Paired with their selected brides, they stood in an open square of fires, the heat being uncomfortably close on three sides.

Thus the Rev. Joseph Blakely found them.

Stepping into the clearing, he stood for a moment surveying the scene. He had arrived on Tonakua the previous evening, and, finding the coast village almost deserted, had guessed that his flock had gone astray. At daybreak he had started with his wife and daughter for the peak.

Mrs. Blakely was as fat and comfortable as her husband was lean and zealous. Their daughter was a demure young woman with a wholesome taste for life and a wealth of discontent with her isolated existence on a lonely island.

"The wiles of Satan never cease!" the missionary shouted through his hands. "Oh, ye of little faith, be sure your sins will find you out!"

The warning echoed down the slope. Ephraim and Horatio gave a simultaneous shout of joy. Their ears had caught the sound of English, and their eyes had revealed a white man. The native women fell away in confusion.

"Stranger," Ephraim called, while the newcomer was some distance away, "you're just in time!"

Horatio was staring past him at the two white women, who made a more leisurely approach in his wake.

"Ephraim, there are women, too," he said. "White women!"

Mr. Ephraim Hunt's mouth flew open.

"Go back, for God's sake!" he bawled, swinging his arms in sailor fashion to enforce his orders. "Get out of this, and take them women with you!" His chivalric impulses intensified his excitement. "You pin-legged slice of folly!" he roared. "Get out while you can, I tell you!"

The man's apparent indifference to the welfare of his women infuriated Mr. Hunt.

"You—" he bellowed in a frenzy.

"Silence!" The missionary's solemn tones rang hollowly. He stood before the second mate, white with godly anger. "You blasphemer, you corrupter of women's bodies and souls, you—"

For the first time Mr. Hunt became aware of the newcomer's clerical garb. Horatio recognized it at the same instant.

"Cheese it, mate!" he rasped harshly,

unconsciously resorting to a boyhood phrase. "It's a preacher!"

The missionary turned on him with blazing eyes.

"Correct!" he boomed. "I'm glad to see you recognize the cloth. Satan's cohorts have good cause!"

Before his flaming wrath the two men stood bewildered, speechless.

"So," the irate evangelist went on, "you steal among my flock in my absence, and lead them into pagan ways for the sake of your fleshly lusts! You would have pretended to marry my poor innocents—"

He stopped, because his wife and daughter had arrived, panting, at his elbow. The faces of the steward and the second mate were a confusing study. Something in their expression struck the divine curiously. Moreover, his daughter ventured a remark.

"Papa," she murmured, looking at Horatio, "there's some mistake here. These men—this gentleman—"

Horatio was covered with confusion. He felt his cheeks burn and his eyes grow hot. Mr. Hunt gave him a single glance, swept the young lady with another, and, advancing with immense dignity, presented himself.

"I am second mate of the ship *Mari-nello*—Mr. Ephraim Hunt," he said. Jerking a thumb in Horatio's direction, he added: "That's the steward."

"I don't in the least doubt it." Mr. Blakely was not anxious to be placated. "Where, sir, is your ship?"

Ephraim was somewhat embarrassed.

"Well," he said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "I can't just tell. By my reckonin' I'd say that by this time she's somewheres five hundred miles or so south by southeast of this blasted island."

"Precisely!" the missionary snapped. "And you two have deserted her for—ah—for the temptations of these poor island people!"

Mrs. Blakely uttered a shocked "Ah!" at once rich with wonder and replete with disapprobation. Supported by it, her husband's manner took on fresh severity.

Mr. Hunt hurried to explain.

"That's no fault of mine—no, sir!" Guided by an inner illumination regarding the person addressed, he added confidently: "My presence here's due to an act of God." The phrase sounded convincing to him. "An act of God, sir," he repeated heartily.



Mr. Blakely seldom allowed his temper to dominate his conduct. There were times, however, when he felt that the influences he had undertaken to combat justified a righteous rage; and the second mate's calm, not to say eager, attribution of his present situation to the deity was certainly such an occasion. The missionary's lean features worked spasmodically.

At this point Horatio stepped forward resolutely. Stung by Ephraim's assumption of superiority in the presence of a young lady who had specifically indicated her recognition of his gentility, the steward had borne intense embarrassment and a full share of disappointment with creditable poise; but the second mate's reply to the good pastor's inquiries had shocked him too much to be borne in silence. Flushed and excited, he thrust an explanation of his own into the conversation.

"Mr. Hunt's only a second mate on a Yankee schooner," he declared. "I don't believe he's familiar with the ways of God and good society."

Miss Blakely giggled. Ephraim uttered a choking cough and glared. Mr. Blakely turned swiftly upon Horatio.

"Are *you*?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir!" Something told Horatio that this was one of the supreme moments of his life. He mustered up all his courage. "I am indeed," he plunged.

"Indéed!" Mr. Blakely echoed sarcastically. "Then you will no doubt find it possible to explain to a mere servant of the Most High just how His actions brought about this shameful pagan gathering and made you one of Satan's chosen bridegrooms!"

Horatio gasped and took a backward step. Looked at impersonally, it did seem rather difficult to give the missionary the desired information. Even a hurried glance suggested somewhat sharp contradictions between the ways of Providence and those of the natives of Tonakua.

"W-well," he stammered, "w-w-well—"

"Quite well," Miss Blakely murmured faintly, and withdrew, blushing, from an irate father's rebuking glance.

The young lady's interjection of an obviously light retort into a situation conspicuously heavy was more than Horatio's stamina could weather. He was utterly confused, and took meek refuge behind the spreading shoulders of Ephraim Hunt. That worthy seaman sought support in an

enormous chew, which he bit from a plug with difficulty, gripping the corner with his teeth and twisting the plug up and down with both hands.

Mr. Blakely watched the process with increasing horror, but not without considerable wonder. Mrs. Blakely seemed to share her husband's feelings. Under the second mate's uplifted elbow Horatio caught a glimpse of Miss Blakely's profile. She was facing the throng of natives, who watched and waited anxiously. Several times she sniffed the air inquiringly, and suddenly she said aloud:

"They're baking fish. I smell it, and it's good!"

"Mehitabel!" her mother murmured reproachfully.

Mr. Blakely turned upon his daughter, and looked past her to his flock. For them his rebuke must be one of kindly sorrow. Poor children of the tropics, what could they do when his protecting presence was withdrawn and the wickedness of ships was thrust among them?

Again he faced the waiting second mate.

"Wolves!" he muttered sadly. "Wolves that have entered my fold!"

Ephraim's chew was functioning properly now, and his ability to cope with the situation was—from his point of view, at least—greatly improved.

"I'll tell you, parson," he said carelessly. "That's all right, if you like it, but you can take my word for one thing—Ephraim Hunt's seen a whole lot of sharks he'd as soon be put to corrupt as these here sheep of yours!"

Miss Blakely walked slowly toward the natives, her erect young figure showing no terror in the presence of the brown-skinned folk. As Horatio watched her, it seemed to him that Ephraim had been too emphatic. Sharks were pretty dangerous—too dangerous for an attractive girl like Mehitabel to walk among.

"Ephraim," he said in a tone of mild reproof, emerging from his proximity to the second mate's elbow, "don't you think you exaggerate sometimes?" He met Mrs. Blakely's glance, and, finding a hint of grace therein, added: "I assure you he does, madam."

Horatio's manner was compounded of ingredients derived from Mrs. Bindle's boarding house and the office of Stoddard & Stoddard. There was something worldly and convincing about it.

"Ah, yes," murmured the missionary. "Yes—in moments of stress we are prone to do just that—all of us."

"Thank you," said Horatio. "We both feel that an understanding—ah—"

"We'd like to have you know," contributed Mr. Hunt, with a grim determination to prove his social grace, "as you'd also like to have us know, just what's what. There ain't no cause for anybody to raise hell when there's only three white men in a whole island."

At this point Mr. Blakely achieved a diplomatic triumph. Thoroughly understanding Ephraim's speech and highly disapproving of it, he bowed and replied:

"My daughter has remarked that our good people are baking fish. The smell is most engaging. Possibly all of us would be less interested in hell, Mr. Hunt, if we had properly attended to the demands of the material man."

"Yes, sir!" agreed Ephraim heartily.

Horatio smiled at Mrs. Blakely, and, turning toward Mehitabel, once more summoned up all his courage.

"Permit me to present myself—Horatio Silvester Hopkins, Miss—"

"Blakely," she whispered, staring fixedly. What would he say next?

Her father and mother exchanged glances, and Mr. Blakely interposed.

"I am the Rev. Joseph Blakely," he said urbanely. "My wife and daughter, Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Hunt."

"I," said Horatio suavely, "have the honor to represent the firm of Stoddard & Stoddard, San Francisco."

Mr. and Mrs. Blakely were impressed, and showed it. So was Ephraim Hunt. His eyes dilated with a sort of strained wonder.

"Haugh!" burst from his lips explosively, and he turned away to gaze in mystical contemplation at the horizon line.

Mrs. Blakely eyed him suspiciously. Mehitabel stole shy glances at Horatio. The missionary bowed again.

"If you will allow me a moment with my flock—" he said.

"Not a long sermon, papa!" Mehitabel suggested hopefully.

"It's past dinner time," added the practical Mrs. Blakely.

### VIII

THEY were comfortably seated, with baked fish, crab meat, and several fruits,

before the missionary mildly hinted that he would be glad to have certain obscurities concerning his unexpected guests cleared up. He was a good listener and a fair-minded man. There was no reason to discount the truth of the story told by Horatio and Ephraim. In fact, as Mr. Blakely listened, his dark eyes showed a flash of austere humor.

"Well, well!" he muttered thoughtfully, and added, with a benign smile: "I'm afraid my poor children have been amusing themselves rather naughtily at your expense."

"The hell they have!" Mr. Hunt said bluntly, and was instantly abashed.

Mehitabel laughed merrily, and her gaze rested on Ephraim with a deepened interest. Horatio was inclined to find it more disturbing than he could enjoy. One might have thought that the second mate's profanity fascinated the missionary's daughter. Moving to Ephraim's side, she smiled into the flattered seaman's eyes and demurely asked him if he was not a story teller.

"You must know lots of thrilling things," she suggested. "Men at sea—"

Ephraim withered Horatio with a triumphant glance.

"I do, miss," he declared. "I know whole books of things." And he added significantly: "Mighty fascinatin' things, miss, but I don't tell 'em in some company." His gaze invited her attention to Horatio. "No, miss," he went on suavely, "I save 'em for people like yourself, as can appreciate a real man's adventures."

It was decided that the entire camp should return at once to the coast village. Starting immediately, they would arrive before night.

"I'm afraid you will be stranded here for some time," Mr. Blakely told his guests. "No ship is likely to put in at Tonakua within the next three weeks."

"Your vessel won't return, you think?" Mrs. Blakely asked.

Mehitabel awaited the answer anxiously, and looked relieved when Ephraim assured her that the chances were remote indeed.

The coastward march was begun. Mr. Blakely was interested in the subject of Pacific trade, and he engaged the representative of Stoddard & Stoddard in a discussion promising to extend the full length of the journey. Mrs. Blakely kept near her husband, though she seldom joined in

the conversation, for she disliked walking, and was conserving her breath for the unwanted exercise. Thus Ephraim and Mehitable were able to drop some distance behind the other white people.

Horatio noted this fact with extreme dejection; and as occasional ripples of girlish laughter reached his ears, he grew less and less contented. Intuition warned him that Mr. Ephraim Hunt was embellishing the story of a San Francisco stenographer named Hopkins, who had been ignominiously shanghaied aboard the *Marinello*.

Under the stimulation of Mehitable's interest Ephraim certainly talked well. He was aware that his narrative powers were functioning with unusual success, and his spirits rose. After all, a few weeks in the missionary's home would not be unendurable.

"Stoddard & Stoddard?" he said. "Yes, ma'am—Mr. Hopkins can tell you more about that firm than any man alive. He knows that sort of stuff, and no mistake. Me, I've been a seaman as lived and roamed the world a searchin' for romance. No dry office job for me, Miss Blakely! I've been a wanderer on the face of the oceans, and I've seen things that your pretty, innocent head wouldn't believe was real, they was so wicked."

"Honest?" Mehitable breathed fathomless excitement into that simple word, and her eyes danced with pleasure. "Will you tell me about them?"

"I'll tell you anything," Ephraim promised.

"Even the wickedest things?" Miss Blakely drew close to ask in a half whisper.

"The worse than wickedest," Ephraim assured her, and was moved to a passing philosophical reflection. "One thing I've learned," he told the listening young lady. "Many a seaman's very powerfulest stories gets spoiled clean past all savin' by too many hearin' ears!"

"I know," she said softly. "Papa and mother never care for stories of adventure. We wouldn't think of bothering them. They have too much to do."

"Mr. Hopkins could be very helpful to them," suggested the second mate. "He's the most helpful sort, but he's shy, in a way. You just tell your pa to ask him to do a little work. He'll only be miserable if he ain't kept occupied, having so many weeks to spend away from that office of his back at Frisco."

Mehitable conveyed Ephraim's suggestion to her father with the delicacy natural to so sweet a girl. Waiting until the guests had retired for the night, she stood beside her father's chair, and, slipping an arm across his shoulders, laid her cheek to his.

"Papa," she murmured tenderly, "Mr. Hunt asked me to tell you that Mr. Hopkins dislikes idleness more than anything in the world, and that it would be a kindness if you would ask him to help you for a week or two with your reports and books and things. He thinks Mr. Hopkins would hesitate to suggest it, but if you would ask him—"

Mr. Blakely warmed perceptibly.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, caressing the girl's soft hair affectionately. "Mr. Hunt shows a good deal of tact in being so considerate of his friend's sensitiveness. Really, you know"—he paused reflectively—"I think they are most genial men, once one learns to interpret their ways, and very wholesome fellows to have sailed about the world so much."

"Oh, yes!" Mehitable grew enthusiastic. Her eyes were wide and starry. "Mr. Hunt has seen such wicked things! He spoke of them very briefly," she hastened to add, "and seemed very sad to think of them. I'm sure they must have distressed him terribly."

"My child, I must counsel you not to speak of the things of the world with either of these men. Remember, we must give them the proper impression of our mission—God's lighthouse among these islands."

Meanwhile Ephraim and Horatio were sitting together in the room that they were to share. The second mate was in a cheerful frame of mind, but Horatio was tired and disinclined to talk. Ephraim was disposed to regard this feeling, but there were things he felt impelled to say.

"You know," he began, "I've always been a friend to you, steward, and willin' to help you any way as I was able."

"Yes," said Horatio curtly.

"Well, I've fixed it up for you," Ephraim went on. "I've fixed it so you'll be entertained all the weary days we have to stay here. I fixed it this afternoon with Miss Blakely."

Horatio sat up, staring. A tingle of surprised delight flushed his weary body with warming gratitude.

"You did?"

"Sure I did!" The second mate was

somewhat grieved at Horatio's lingering doubt. "Ain't I your friend?"

"Ephraim, I always felt you were," Horatio murmured. His memory revived a picture of Mehitabel walking courageously toward the silent natives. How lithe and young and beautiful she was! "Ephraim," he said effusively, "I'm grateful to you."

Mr. Hunt nodded understandingly.

"I knew you would be, so I went ahead and fixed it with her. I told her to tell her dad how hungry you were for a taste of the old office work, and how glad you'd be to kill the long, dull days helpin' straighten up his books. I know they're in a bad way, steward. Missionaries' papers always is."

He stopped because of the altered look in Horatio's eyes.

"What's the matter, steward?" he asked solicitously. "You ain't sick, I hope! I'd hate to see you have to miss that pleasure—you so long away from the good feelin' of a real office, too."

"No," said Horatio, "I'm not sick." For a little while he stood gazing out of the window. "Ephraim," he went on, "do you know what I think?"

"No," answered Ephraim. "I don't guess I do, steward."

"Well," Horatio informed him, jerking viciously at a knotted shoe string, "if you ever find out, you'll have a whole lot clearer notion about yourself than you've got now!"

"Meanin'?" said Ephraim blandly.

Horatio did not answer. No further conversation seemed required, and side by side the two lay down to pass the first of many nights under the Rev. Joseph Blakely's roof.

## IX

THE most fastidiously critical of men could have found no fault with the delicacy of Mr. Blakely's request to Horatio for help. There was humility in his bearing, and a gracious suggestion that his guest was wholly free to exercise his own desires. Horatio readily complied, and after breakfast the two set to work.

Ephraim lounged on the shaded veranda without. Toward ten o'clock Mehitabel—quite accidentally, of course—came upon him there, and paused to exchange morning salutations. She stayed to chat awhile, and presently the two were sitting side by side on a bench, Ephraim talking

and the girl listening with bated breath. Whenever he glanced up from the confusion of papers before him, Horatio could see them with their heads close together, and occasionally he caught the sound of Mehitabel's rapt exclamations.

At lunch he was silent and absorbed. The good missionary was concerned.

"Perhaps the heat has been unpleasant," he suggested. "It might be well to leave the office this afternoon. I have in mind a little expedition among the home industries I have installed—if that would interest you, Mr. Hopkins."

Horatio smiled appreciatively.

"My mind is filled with your papers," he said, watching Ephraim's close scrutiny of his face. "I can't leave a half finished job. If you don't mind, I'll keep to the office to-day."

"But you mustn't let my husband overwork you," Mrs. Blakely interposed.

Horatio looked full into Ephraim's eyes.

"I'm not working," he declared enthusiastically. "I'm enjoying myself. Please don't spoil my fun!"

Mehitabel was watching him, too, but Horatio did not look at her. During the entire meal his attention was centered upon her parents. One might have felt, and perhaps Mehitabel did feel, that he was unaware of the girl's presence.

The idea merely flitted through her mind, however. She was deeply interested in a half told tale of Ephraim's, and eager to hear its conclusion. The difference between morning and afternoon, so far as Horatio was concerned, lay in the fact that during the later hours the two heads were seen through an east window on an opposite porch.

The missionary, who was aware of his own deficiencies as an accountant, was delighted with Horatio's industry. He spoke of it to Mrs. Blakely, and found that she was a warm partisan of Horatio's.

"He's a fine young man," she said. "I don't see how he ever happened to be with such a rough fellow as that sailor."

"My dear," replied her husband, "the best of men can't always choose their associates. Horatio, I'm sure—"

"Of course," Mrs. Blakely hastened to interpose; "but I do wish Horatio might have a little leisure. Mehitabel—"

"Yes"—Mr. Blakely nodded—"Mehitabel spends too much time with Mr. Hunt. Quite true!"



Thus, in the bosom of the family, Mr. Hopkins became "Horatio," while Ephraim remained "Mr. Hunt," and the good Blakelys voiced a common mood regarding the apparent preference of their only daughter.

Meanwhile, Mehitabel was listening to Ephraim's adventures with growing disappointment. He told of nothing so excitingly wicked as some of the places of which she had read descriptions in tracts put out by the organization represented by her father—tracts setting forth the dangers of dives at home and dance halls in foreign ports more luridly than Ephraim's descriptive powers could achieve.

"Pooh!" she told him before lunch the second day, as he labored to do justice to some of his adventures in Shanghai. "I know of places lots wickeder than that. I've read all about them!"

Ephraim was secretly incredulous. Before his memory arose the vision of the fact, and he failed to realize that his words were not adequately presenting realities. He was sharply conscious that the interest of his audience lagged, however, and he felt relieved when luncheon came.

So did Mehitabel. She was aware of an increasing curiosity to know whether Horatio's absorption in her father's records was permanent or only a passing mood. Would he be too much engrossed in his work to realize that she was at the table?

It proved that he was even more absorbed than on the preceding day, and Mehitabel joined Ephraim for the afternoon with signs of irritability gathering in her pretty face. The narrator of bold adventures in bad places found his audience extremely difficult, and was correspondingly disturbed.

From time to time the natives came and went, stopping at the office to speak with the missionary. Ephraim watched them with resentment, for they disturbed his mood. Mehitabel watched them more and more steadily. Among them was the girl who had selected Horatio to be her mock bridegroom. She came most frequently and lingered longest in the office.

"I wonder what Malaka wants at the office! She's been there a dozen times today," Mehitabel thrust irrelevantly into the climax of one of Ephraim's stories.

His artistic tension was broken.

"What's that? Who?" he muttered, staring stupidly around. "Oh, her!" he

added, seeing the native girl emerge from Horatio's presence.

"Yes," Mehitabel said peevishly. "Yes—her."

Ephraim ruminated. A full minute passed.

"Well," he said confidentially, "I guess it's the steward. He's a regular bad one with these foreign women. Yes, sir—he's wicked with 'em!"

Mehitabel was staring open-eyed.

"It's truth," Ephraim declared. "I've seen it before this. He's told me so himself. Funny thing is, he don't seem to care for his own breed. White ones, he says—leastways American white ones—just don't seem to have no charm at all."

Mehitabel's eyes flashed dangerously, but she made no comment. Standing for a moment, she looked through the window at the head of Horatio, bent earnestly over his work. Then she turned and left Ephraim Hunt without a backward glance.

The following morning Mehitabel walked calmly past Ephraim, and, apparently unaware of his accusing glances, entered the office. Her father had been called to visit a native who was sick, and Horatio was alone. Bending over a ledger, he was writing industriously. The girl's light step warned him that she was approaching, and his cheeks flooded with color, but he managed to keep a steady hand.

Mehitabel waited for a moment. Horatio seemed unaware of her.

"Your power of concentration is admirable, Mr. Hopkins!" she said, making no effort to soften the edge of irony that sharpened her voice.

"Has to be," replied Horatio, sweeping aside one stack of papers and reaching for another.

"I suppose so," Mehitabel murmured. "I congratulate you!"

Horatio was transcribing figures. He did not answer. Mehitabel moved impatiently. Her eyes smoldered.

"I suppose office men are human," she said, as if reflecting.

"Twenty-seven — thirty-three — forty-two," said Horatio.

Mehitabel's eyes flashed, and her lower lip drew between her pearly teeth.

"At least," she pursued her audible thinking, "they are impolite enough!"

"Twenty-nine — thirty-eight — forty-seven," said Horatio.

"Football signals?" inquired Mehitabel.

Horatio stilled a racing heart and steeled a wavering will.

"Sorry, Miss Blakely," he said coldly, "but I believe Mr. Hunt is waiting to tell you an adventure."

Mehitabel flamed scarlet, and her little hands clenched.

"Good morning!" she snapped briskly, and turned on her heel.

Horatio slammed the ledger noisily and rustled many papers.

Mehitabel joined Ephraim on the bench outside.

"Your friend," she stated pointedly, "is impossible, Mr. Hunt!"

Ephraim felt a wave of exaltation. Guided by it, he spoke with what he felt to be supreme inspiration.

"Yep," he agreed heartily, "he is. You see, you're a plain white woman, miss, and Mr. Hopkins likes a lot of color."

Mehitabel rose with a flurry.

"Thank you," she said over a lifted shoulder, and walked rapidly away.

Ephraim stared perplexedly. His mouth opened, and he rose to follow her.

"I say!" he called. "I'd like to go along. I've got a story—"

A stealthy glance told Mehitabel that Horatio was watching through the window. She altered intention, and motioned the second mate toward a path leading among the tangled trees and creepers beyond the village. Ephraim quickened his pace, and they disappeared together.

## X

HORATIO continued to add columns of figures, but his writing hand developed strange caprices and could not be trusted to put down the proper totals. Presently he laid his work aside and sat disconsolately gazing out of the window.

Malaka came and stood beside his desk. Her cotton dress had fallen open, disclosing the curve of her bosom, but she did not notice it. Her golden brown eyes studied her erstwhile bridegroom thoughtfully, while her red lips were arched and smiling.

Horatio had been disturbed by her frequent visits. Now, however, he welcomed her. Even a native girl may prove a consolation under some circumstances.

"Look here!" he said. "I want to ask you something. Will you tell me?"

Malaka nodded her bright little head enthusiastically.

"All right!" Horatio rested an elbow

on the desk and studied her not unattractive face. "What makes women act as they do?"

Malaka considered the problem gravely. Her pidgin English vocabulary made understanding a little difficult, but she arrived at an answer which seemed suitable to her.

"Woman," she said, "want to catch one man."

Horatio shook a dissenting head.

"No?" Malaka asked. "Not right, maybe?"

"Not this time," Horatio declared emphatically.

Malaka gave the matter further thought. For a time her face was grave, but presently her smile returned and her eyes were dancing once again.

"All right!" She spoke deliberately. "Woman not like it for man not try catch her."

Horatio shook his head again.

"No, no!" he said. "You're all wrong. You don't understand."

Malaka's dignity became imposing. Her eyes showed sudden fire.

"Malaka watch you—watch Miss Hita-bel," she stated. "Malaka not wrong. You all wrong—you one damn big fool!"

Turning grandly, she strode from the office.

The remainder of the week was a prolonged trial, during which Horatio searched and reinvestigated Malaka's startling philosophy with increasingly baffling results. The end of the week brought the end of his work, and Horatio closed the last report with a flourish.

"Everything is correct now," he told Mr. Blakely, "down to the final decimal."

At least he could enjoy the triumph of a good deed well done. The missionary grasped his two hands feelingly.

"My boy," he said, "I shall never be able to thank you. I found you here, and denounced you for a rascal. I kept you here, and now I praise you for a generous friend!"

Horatio's emotions moved uncomfortably. He was not accustomed to praise.

"Thank you," he murmured. "I've been glad to help you."

Looking out of the window to the bench where Ephraim and Mehitabel were sitting, he felt a sudden pang of regret.

The passing days had not been unevent-

ful in the lives of Ephraim and his audience. The second mate had been put to harder and harder exertion to entertain a young lady who seemed more irritable and less easily satisfied with every passing hour. His eagerness had given place to desperation. Glancing up, he saw Horatio emerge from the office, and a sudden idea was born in his manly breast.

"Hello!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Steward's finished the books. He's a great story teller, miss, if you just get him goin';" and Ephraim waved enthusiastically to Horatio.

Mehitabel only stared indifferently. Her pulse was racing, but she was not to be swept into forgetfulness of Horatio's conduct.

Horatio surveyed them from a distance. Something in Ephraim's attitude conveyed a revelation to his groping mind. He hurried gayly forward.

"Ephraim," he said, as he drew near, "I'm free at last to join you. I've been working hard to finish, so that I could hear your stories. Now"—he sat beside them, smiling at Mehitabel—"we'll make him unwind the wonderful tales I know he's got hidden in that head of his. You leave it to me!"

Ephraim writhed uneasily.

"No, steward," he pleaded, "I'd rather keep still and listen to some of your masterpieces."

Horatio's laugh was graciously deprecating. He waved this suggestion aside with an appeal to Mehitabel.

"Has Ephraim ever told you about the trip he took on a small sailboat to Tierra del Fuego, where the people are all giants and the women eat their husbands every fall?"

Mehitabel's innocent eyes flew open. So did Ephraim's mouth.

"He never did," Mehitabel exclaimed, looking reproachfully at the second mate.

"Why," said Ephraim, wiping his chin nervously, "I couldn't, miss!"

"But why?" inquired Mehitabel. "I told you I wanted something really terrible."

"I don't understand it," Horatio murmured. "Why, Ephraim, I thought you'd tell that first of all!"

"They eat their husbands every fall?" Mehitabel stared at Ephraim. "But what for? Where do they get new ones all the time?"

"They go out and capture them from other tribes," Horatio prodded Ephraim's memory. "You know, Ephraim. Go ahead and tell her!"

"If you don't, I'll never speak to you again," Mehitabel threatened, with a fine show of sincerity.

"Please, Ephraim," Horatio urged. "You ought to."

"Well," Mr. Hunt glared ferociously, "you see—" He stopped awkwardly. "It was in—" He looked appealingly at Horatio.

"Yes!" said Horatio and Mehitabel together.

"In—" muttered Ephraim, and suddenly he swore. "Damn it, Horatio, where'd you say?"

Horatio shook his head.

"You know," he said. "I can't pronounce it properly."

Mehitabel waited. Ephraim studied his boot.

"Twarn't!" he asserted at last, violently. "Twarn't at all!"

"What?" Mehitabel was leaning forward. "It wasn't what?"

"I never was there in a sailboat," declared Mr. Hunt in a resolute tone. "I never heard of such a place, neither."

"All right, if you won't tell!" said Mehitabel. "I'm tired of your stories, anyhow!"

Mr. Hunt turned a dull crimson and got up.

"Steward," he said, facing Horatio, "that's a scabby trick, and I ain't the man to forget such a thing!"

With that he strode hurriedly away. Horatio and Mehitabel watched him go.

"Of course," Horatio murmured sorrowfully, "I've heard him tell it, so I can give you what I remember, but—"

"Will you?" Mehitabel sat down and laid a hand on Horatio's arm. "Will you?"

Horatio was motionless. A daring thought held him prisoner to its immense possibilities. Suddenly, swiftly, he clapped his palm upon the girl's slender hand and gripped it.

"I will," he said, not giving her time to withdraw or protest; "but I'd like to tell you another story first."

"About what?"

"About an island girl I met," he stammered.

Mehitabel recalled Ephraim's confidence

regarding the moral character of Mr. Hopkins. She snatched away her hand.

"Thank you, no," she said, rising.

"But," Horatio argued, "you must listen! Her name was Mehitabel!"

"Oh!" said the missionary's daughter, staying her intended flight.

"I love her!" Horatio finished.

Mehitabel caught her breath and looked at him. The color slowly flushed her cheeks. Sitting down, she murmured, looking away dreamily:

"It might be made more interesting, Horatio!"

Mehitabel repeated Horatio's story to her mother in the kitchen before dinner, and Mrs. Blakely relayed it to her husband that night. In the morning the missionary asked to see Horatio in the office. The proud but slightly nervous young adventurer stood before the desk.

"Yes, sir!" he said.

Mr. Blakely clasped his hand.

"My boy, I'm glad to know—"

"Yes, sir," Horatio murmured.

"There's a fortune in this island for a business man," the missionary suggested. "There's a real fortune for a man with his family and all his interests centered here."

Horatio raised his eyes. A great load vanished from his breast.

"Yes, sir," he said for the third time. "I've been thinking that ever since I started on your books."

"Good!" cried Mr. Blakely. "Good!" He stood up. "My office will do for both of us—I to attend to the spiritual welfare of Tonakua, you to the island's material interests. It will be wonderful!"

"I think she is," Horatio agreed, thinking of a girl whose head he saw shyly half hidden beyond the office window.

"That's settled, then!" said Mr. Blakely; and it was.

THE END

### THE COQUETTE

If you saw golden  
Mushrooms spring  
Where crystal-shaken  
Rain bells ring;

If you saw spotted  
Spiders crawl  
Above the lichen  
On the wall;

If you saw these,  
And will not tell,  
I do not like you  
Half as well.

For I must learn  
To sew and knit,  
And rock demurely  
Where I sit.

If you should ask  
Me for a kiss,  
I think I shall  
Remember this!

So run along  
And leap the hedge,  
But do not cross  
My window ledge!

Ah, then, if you  
Will not obey,  
Come tell me all  
You saw to-day!

Sonia Ruthële Novák



# Under Crashing Walls

HOW BENSON, THE NEW FIRE CHIEF, AND OLD TOM FOLEY, HIS VETERAN ASSISTANT, SHARED A DRAMATIC EXPERIENCE IN FIGHTING A DANGEROUS BLAZE

By Karl W. Detzer

THE new chief of the fire department leaned across the desk in the first assistant's office and waved a neat little red notebook in his subordinate's face. It was the 3rd of January, a snapping cold morning. The new chief had commanded the department exactly forty-eight hours.

"The old-time stuff's out, Foley," he said sharply. "It's out from this minute. We're going to have efficiency!"

"Yes, sir," replied old Tom Foley.

"Efficiency, science, modern fire fighting—that's what the city administration wants, and I can give it!"

"Yes, sir," old Tom Foley agreed. "I expect you can, sir."

There was a hint of speculation in his tone. The new chief caught it.

"That's why they hired me," he said.

"That's why they brought me in from the outside, instead of promoting one of you fellows. See the department understands it, Foley—understands it right from the start. We're going to have efficiency!"

"Yes, sir," Foley agreed again. He delayed a minute before he asked the next question. Since the start of this interview it had burned in his mind. "Every lug hose yourself, sir?" he asked.

"Never! I'm a fire engineer—an efficiency expert."

"I know," old Tom answered.

He looked at the new chief thoughtfully. He knew the name of James G. Benson. What Johnny-jump-up in the department didn't? It was familiar wherever firemen and insurance underwriters conferred; but its owner was younger than old Tom had expected—younger by thirty years.

"Any other orders?" the older man asked.

The new chief had not had time to re-

ply when a small, impatient chatter of steel on steel set up below stairs in the quarters of Engine Company 91.

"Joker alarm," old Tom commented. "Calling Engine 12 on a still. Way down southwest of here, three or four miles."

"Engine 12?"

"Aye."

"Haven't had a chance to learn the code yet," the new chief admitted; "but what I came to tell you is this—the city wants a new deal, and that's what I'm going to give it. Worn-out ideas are through, and worn-out equipment!" He hesitated. "And worn-out men," he added sharply. "Fire fighting's a young man's job. Men in my department have got to stand the gaff. I'll depend on you, Foley, to help me begin weeding out as soon as I'm settled. There's too much dead timber—you know that."

"Yes, sir—lots o' political appointments, sir."

"Exactly; and unsuitable men kept in the department because of sentiment. I'll permit neither politics nor sentiment to interfere with efficiency!" He leaned back in his chair and looked hard at Tom Foley. "Pretty agile yourself?" he asked, and added, before Foley could reply: "How old are you?"

"Sixty-eight last August."

"Health good?"

"Pretty fair."

A bell interrupted—a nervous little bell below stairs. Old Tom counted its taps.

"Engine 12 pulled the box," he said. "Fire got away from 'em. Box 421, close to the river, down in the furniture district."

"Health pretty fair?" the chief persisted.

"Yes, sir—a bit stiff in the joints sometimes; but I get around good enough yet."

Chief Benson looked hard at the first assistant marshal. For two minutes neither spoke. Old Tom's parched, leathery face, pitted by the scars of a thousand battles with fire, darkened a little under his superior's stare. His mouth, tightened by age, was set in a hard, combative line.

"Was you thinking—" he began.

The bell downstairs broke in. Four, two, one—four, two, one—four, eleven—four, two, one.

"A four-eleven!" Tom said. He stood up deliberately. "Pulled it right on top of the box. I best be going. Fire got away from the companies on the box alarm. This brings in sixteen pumper. Best be going!"

He stuffed his mouth with scrap tobacco and held the sack open for Benson. The chief shook his head.

"Sixteen?" he cried. His voice was excited. "I'll go with you!"

He upset his chair as he leaped to his feet. Old Tom surveyed him calmly for a moment, and then, crossing the office, wrapped his arms about a brass pole and slid through the hole in the floor. He landed gently beside his thick-chested red car. Captain and crew of Engine 91 were already gathered about the alarm stand near the door. One man was calling off numbers hurriedly—numbers of engines, ladder trucks, flying squadrons, and insurance patrols, while a mate chalked them clumsily upon a small square blackboard.

"Whose signature on that four-eleven?" Foley asked quietly.

"Byrne, battalion chief of the Seventh."

"She's a snorter, then! Byrne don't pull a four-bagger for a bonfire."

He glanced up the brass pole and then at the stairway across the rear of the apparatus room. The new chief had not slid the pole, but was using the stair. Once down, he hurried between the pumper and the assistant marshal's car, pulled open the car door, and stumbled into old Tom's seat.

For a moment Tom looked hard at his superior, compressing his narrow mouth; but he said nothing as he climbed into the rear seat. The small bell on the box alarm instrument spoke again just as he was slamming the door—ten quick taps and then a jumble of numbers.

"What's that mean?" Benson still spoke excitedly.

"A bad 'un! First special alarm, ten more companies. That means twenty-six pumpers. Warsaw and Twenty-Eighth," he told his driver. "Step on it!"

The new chief of department shook a cigarette from a torn package and clenched it in his hand unlighted. He leaned forward in his seat as the driver started the car. The engine house doors swung open, and cold winds leaped in.

"I'll let you handle this job, Foley," Chief Benson said. "Simply keep my eyes open. Want to see your system."

"Very good, sir," old Tom answered. "Show you how we do it."

The car swung violently at an icy corner. Mounted police and foot patrolmen were herding excited pedestrians and stubborn taxicab drivers out of the path. The siren on the first assistant's great car screamed maliciously, and its brass bell clanged an intermittent tattoo. Traffic opened a wide avenue. Behind thundered Engine 91, plunging enthusiastically in old Tom Foley's wake, in answer to the first special alarm.

"Three miles of straightaway," Foley said. He leaned forward, trying to see through the windshield. He was unaccustomed to the rear seat. "Lots of smoke!"

It hung in mottled layers upon the frosty air, yellow in the sunshine. Far ahead a great black pillar rose into the sky.

Again Foley's driver jerked to the right. Crowds were running here. Engine and ladder companies, plunging out of side streets, fell in behind the first assistant marshal. Street cars, in long, patient rows, waited upon the south-bound track.

"It's Jackson's," Foley said quietly over his driver's shoulder. "Reed furniture factory. Reed—that's paper and glue and paint!"

Engine companies were laying their hose in the thin covering of sooty snow. An ambulance with an apologetic little bell moved cautiously through the crowd. The air vibrated with the throb of pumping engines already at work.

"A snorter!" Tom repeated. His official car dodged past the first police line, over lifeless twists of hose not yet charged. "Looks like it's the south wing. Building's a dump—in two parts, no fire wall between 'em. South wing's storage and paint shop."

Chief Benson leaped from the car before it had stopped. He still clutched the unlighted cigarette. A policeman, unim-

pressed by civilian attire, attempted to halt him at the factory gates.

"Chief of the department," Benson snapped.

Tom Foley, limping slightly, followed behind him. Smoke rolled down from dark upper windows, spiraled through cellar gratings, mounted high into the heavens, or stubbornly curled back to earth. It fell like a dirty curtain of wadded cotton between Tom Foley and the chief.

Foley had stooped in the freight yard inside the gates and soaked a handkerchief at a leaking hose coupling. He clutched the wet rag tight in his hand, inside his rubber jacket, to keep it from freezing. He heard Benson cough once as he ran ahead—cough twice.

Battalion Chief Byrne charged up.

"I pulled the four-eleven and a special for ten more engines, Tom," he reported.

"They're coming in now," Foley told him.

"I got nine lines on top north wing—pushing across the alleyway into fourth-story windows. Two sixty-five foot aërials extended in the alley and water tower's shooting from the west. Then there's five lines at the first-floor doors—big freight doors by the track."

Foley listened patiently. He was stuffing his cheek with tobacco again. Ahead, peering back over his shoulder, Chief Benson blinked his eyes and coughed.

"Found the fire, Byrne?" Tom asked.

"Can't seem to locate it, Tom. It's somewhere in the center—too hot—can't set a foot in. Think it's in the paint shop."

"Aye, that's what I figured. Keep 'em away from the walls—don't want to kill nobody!"

The new chief broke in nervously:

"Not located the fire? Not located it?"

"No, sir," Byrne answered.

"Locate first, Foley!" Benson ordered sharply. "Get inside! Take four or five companies and find it!"

Old Tom hesitated.

"Too hot, sir," the battalion commander volunteered. "I been putting a lot of water in from the top. Truck company went up and ventilated the roof. I brung 'em right down—too chancy!"

"Hot?"

Benson turned swiftly on his first assistant. Smoke filled his throat, and he coughed spasmodically. Foley waited till the fit had passed.

"A bit thick in there, sir," he said. "It's thick with smoke."

"Let smoke stop you?" the chief of department cried. He was stamping his feet in the snow. "Falling walls? What kind of psychology you call that? If you put the fire out, the walls won't fall. Then put it out! In at it! Bring those men down from the roof there, and put 'em inside, where they'll do some good!"

"Chancy," Foley commented.

Benson swung on Byrne.

"Get me a slicker, you, and a helmet! I'll show you, Foley—I'll show you how to put out a fire like this! You old men need pensioning—"

He did not finish. Smoke once more had touched his throat, and he coughed shortly.

"Very good, sir," said old Tom.

Old men! He had guessed it from the first. He knew that this newcomer had been thinking of pensions, including one for him, First Assistant Foley. Turn over his helmet to some young upstart? Some fool who didn't know better than to send good men—men with wives and children—into such a place? Some Johnny-jump-up who wrote books about fire and talked science and psychology, whatever that meant?

## II

THE battalion leader returned with helmet and slicker, and Benson slipped into them. Tom blinked at him through the smoke. He was a well built fellow, and he looked like a fireman now, except for his pink face. His voice was harsh.

"Ordered those companies down, Foley?"

"No, sir." Tom turned uncertainly. He had hoped that the new chief didn't really mean it, but evidently Benson did. "Bring them boys down from the roof, Byrne," he bade. "It's orders. They're hitting it? No difference—bring 'em down, and have 'em follow in!"

An engine crew charged past, running heavily in a tight group about a great brass nozzle. Ten feet ahead loped another battalion chief.

"This way, boys!" Foley shouted. "I've a company, sir." This to the new chief.

Again Benson coughed.

"You know the layout?" He was pulling Foley toward the building. "This door—"

"Leads into the shipping room—runs way across—elevator shafts and stairway on the right behind the tool room."

"Bring that line, men!" Benson cried impatiently. "We're going in!"

Old Tom watched uneasily as the other waded through the smoke. He did not follow for a moment. Gray and yellow clouds were tumbling out of the wide mouth of the door, and the engine crew hesitated.

"In there?" its captain demanded. His voice was rebellious. "Sending us in there?"

Tom nodded silently, and drew the wet handkerchief from his pocket. He saw the new chief for another second—saw him standing erect, heedlessly taking no advantage of the clearer air toward the floor. He was spunky, all right, and willing to take a chance—or else he didn't know any better. Old Tom dropped to his knees and crawled after him.

"Down, men!" commanded Foley. "Hit the ground and follow! It's orders."

He heard the crowd murmur behind him—heard, but chose to ignore it. On hands and knees he hitched over the loading platform. His gloves were wet from the dirty snow. He held the handkerchief in his teeth, wadded into a soggy knot, and breathed through it.

"Take it easy, men!" he cautioned.

Heat splashed across the doorsill—heat and a breathless torrent of dead, burned air. The smoke had a taste of acid. Oily smoke it was, that clung to the lining of men's throats.

"Paint shop!" grumbled old Tom, as he crawled forward into the darkness.

Inside he fumbled, found Benson's heels, and followed them. The chief, too, had taken to the floor by now. He was crawling more slowly. Old Tom lost sight of him where the wall turned. He shouted, but the roar of hidden flame swallowed his voice.

A second time he cried out. It wouldn't do to lose contact with Benson. He would suffocate, up ahead there. He would learn how hot a fire could be, and when smoke was too thick to send good men into it.

Old Tom hitched a little farther forward. He could see nothing, for the smoke shut out all light; but at last his hands touched Benson's boots. The chief was still crawling doggedly—crawling and coughing. He waited when he felt Tom approach. Shouting into Foley's ear, he

demanded to know where the engine company was.

"Coming," Tom answered.

"Slowly!" Benson countered. "Damned slowly! I saw 'em—old men, old captain." He coughed. "Too old to stand the game. Where's that elevator shaft?"

"Over to right," Tom directed. He sprawled flat upon the floor, his nose close to the rough boards. "Can't make it much farther," he shouted.

The new chief replied with an epithet. Spunky, Tom thought again—dumb, but spunky. He hitched up beside his superior.

"Where's that engine crew?" Benson was squalling.

"Follering, sir," Tom answered patiently. "Too hot," he ventured to add. "No sense coming here!"

The chief turned in rage. He was screaming as his face leaned close in front of old Tom's—screaming and choking.

"No sense?" Acid smoke caught in his throat, and he sputtered. "I'll show you what's sense! Get out! I take command myself. You're relieved, Foley! Send those other companies in here!"

"Relieved?" Foley repeated.

His voice was thin. He strangled when he tried the word again, but not from smoke.

"What I said!" Benson's rage was doubled. "Doddering old fool! You're through!"

Tom retreated. His feet stumbled as he passed the swearing engine company twenty paces back. In the wide doorway he saw two other crews. They were peering into the darkness and the hot smoke.

"Go on—follow Engine 18's line," old Tom bade. "New chief's in ahead—aye, in there. It's orders!"

"Orders?" cried a battalion commander outside the door.

"Aye! Boss's orders," Tom Foley said. "I'm out."

"What the hell?" cried the battalion leader. He stopped where he was, staring. His eyes pulled away from Tom's gray face and traveled up the sooty brick front of the building with its wads and plumes of yellow smoke. "She's showing above!" He pointed toward the reflection of flame upon smoke that rolled over the edge of the roof. "What the hell, Tom?" he repeated.

"I'm relieved. You'd best report to Benson. Follow the hose lines."

Tom limped toward his red car. His



mouth snapped shut into its tight, thin line when two other officers intercepted him. To both he spoke shortly. A newspaper reporter hailed him.

"Too busy!" he growled.

His own driver had left the car—working for some battalion chief, no doubt; delivering messages, calling for fresh apparatus. Tom climbed into the front seat and slammed the door shut.

The third assistant marshal—a big, red-faced veteran in a white slicker—came up at a run. He did not see the old man crouched in the big red car, and Tom let him go on. A good man, the third assistant—five years younger than Tom, but, even so, old enough for the new chief to break for the sake of efficiency.

Tom clenched his cold hands together and peered upward at the roof line of the furniture factory. Flame as well as smoke burst out of the top. The walls, marked by occasional cloudy windows, seeped smoke between their bricks. Snow melted and ran in dirty rivulets from the roof gutters. The haze of smoke shut off the sun and cast a sinister half light upon the face of the city. It was a bad fire—and the new chief commanding!

Foley's eyes returned abstractedly to his wet knees, pinched tight together there in the car. His thoughts came back angrily to himself. Emotions—a strange jumble of them—confused him. Too old! The engines, roaring all together, howled the words at his ears:

"Too old!"

Ringlets of smoke spelled them on the sky. He cursed his own years, cursed the tragedy of age. Above all he cursed the folly of Chief Benson, who would send good men into a hellish, suffocating furnace.

He saw more engines arrive, obeying the second special alarm. Their crews set to work before the wheels were still, laying hose noisily. Other engines, pumping veterans of the first box alarm, thundered in chorus close at hand.

Old Tom removed his helmet and crouched lower in his seat. No right to that helmet now! He was out. "Relieved," Benson had said—a big word; but Tom knew what it meant.

He straightened up suddenly. A new sound was rumbling across the factory yard. A falling wall? Either that or a floor dropping. It was like the discharge

of a fieldpiece miles away, obscured by the racket of small arms.

Patrolmen guarding the police line turned quickly and looked in the direction of the tumbling smoke. They weren't firemen, but they understood the significance of a noise like that. Companies of hosemen hesitated and cried:

"There she goes!"

Old Tom leaned out over the door and looked hard at the smoke pouring from the roof, orange at its base, where the flame played, yellow in mid-air, a stiff black column higher in the sky, and beyond that a floating gray haze. For a moment the cloud wavered, then puffed up again. Tom opened the car door and thrust one foot down to the running board. He delayed there for an uncertain minute; then he drew his foot in again and closed the door.

A second deep vibration echoed above the lesser noises of confusion. A red flame, violent and twisting, leaped upward from the roof. Shouts broke through the tumult. Men were running in all directions.

The third assistant marshal, still crimson of face, a great streak of soot across his nose, charged out of the gates.

"Ambulances!" he bellowed. "Anybody see Foley?"

Old Tom raised his voice.

"Here!"

"You, Tom? Got to have orders, 'om!"

"I'm out," Foley answered.

He climbed stiffly from the car, and for three seconds he stared at the great column of fire.

"Out?"

"Too damned old," said Tom, his eyes riveted on the sight above. All thought of complaining died before the challenge of fire. "Boys in there?" he asked.

"Three companies! Floors gave way—pinned down—the new boss with 'em! You're in charge, Tom—sure you are! Why, my God, who else would be? You're first assistant—"

"I'm out."

"Somebody's got to be boss!"

Old Tom looked at the other man queerly, then ran ten steps toward the factory. He wheeled once.

"Volunteers!" he shouted. "Four lines! To follow me in!"

Again he hesitated. The third assistant marshal panted behind him.

"I'm out, Joe!" Tom protested. "Chief put me out—said I was too damned old."

"The boys are in there! Under it!"

The queer look came back to Tom's eyes. Again he wheeled.

"Volunteers!" he screamed.

He ran forward. What was age? There were men inside—and the new chief was there!

Flying squadrons with axes, ropes, wrecking bars, and smoke masks trooped across the courtyard. A gaunt red-headed lieutenant, with his leather helmet tipped impudently, ran in the lead, a sputtering green carbide flare in one hand, in the other a double-bladed ax.

"In!" Tom ordered. "Three companies caught! Get 'em out! Give me the ax! Keep men away from the walls," he directed the third assistant. "Put new companies on the roof and drown 'er! Hear me, Joe? Water on it from above!" He turned. "Where's them volunteers?"

"Here, sir!" The red-headed lieutenant ran up breathlessly. "Squad five and squad seven!"

"In! Follow me—along Engine 18's line!"

### III

OLD Tom plunged forward across the doorsill into the smoky, breathless heat of the shipping room. He forgot the new chief, forgot the stiffness in his knees, forgot the rickety walls swaying overhead. He heard flame roaring like wind in a great chimney far back in the building. Flashes of red and orange reflection stabbed through holes in the smoke.

Twenty feet he groped into the darkness. Heat like a million sledges pounded his face. The gray hair at his temples pulled at his tough, blistered skin. He screwed his eyes shut and breathed in short, painful gulps through the wet handkerchief.

Twenty feet—thirty! He tumbled to his knees as the heat battered him down with physical blows. It bludgeoned out of the darkness near the elevator shaft. Tom fell across the hose line of Engine 18. As his gloves closed upon it, he felt the rhythm of the pumping pistons, five hundred feet away in the street. It was better, feeling that throb. With plenty of water they might do it—might haul good firemen out, might haul out the new chief who had sent them into this inferno. Efficiency, eh? Well, if it was efficient to send men in where they couldn't breathe—

Tom crawled on, deeper into the smoke.

His nose, close to the floor, smelled burning paint distinctly now. He held his breath to prevent choking. His eyes, blistered already, made out faint, barely visible flutterings of light ahead—firelight in the elevator shaft.

Engine 18 was somewhere in there, and two other companies—in there under a wall, or pinned down like beetles under a burning floor—Engine 18 and two others, and Chief Benson. Efficiency, eh?

Old Tom hitched forward another three feet. He groped with his hands until his stiff wet fingers in their steaming gloves touched something that resisted the impact. Wood or metal or stone? A wooden beam.

He examined it cautiously. A wall—by the elevator shaft, very likely. The tool room wall? No, it couldn't be. It tilted, it wasn't where it should be. Not a wall—a floor!

A momentary brightness shone above. Tom twisted his neck, and made out a hole in the ceiling. So that was it, eh? This solid beam that his sore fingers had discovered was a section of fallen floor, a section of floor tilting downward like a great, immovable wall, imprisoning three companies—three engine companies and Chief Benson.

Tom dragged himself to the left. He saw the abandoned hose of Engine 18 crawling under the partition. Flame roared just beyond it. Two other hose lines twisted under the wreckage. Above, in the smoky tumult, other boards were ripping off, beams creaked, wasted water was spilling down.

He fumbled weakly for the dirty handkerchief in his teeth. It was dry now, and his lips were parched around it. He wet it in a puddle of water and stuffed it back in his mouth.

Smoke lodged like wool in his throat. His head was tired—tired of the battering of heat. A great emptiness oppressed his stomach. He felt the skin cracking on the back of his neck. His white slicker was sticky where the rubber was melting away.

Still he fumbled ahead, muttering to himself. There must be some way around that terrible wreckage! Where were the firemen? Hadn't he told them to follow? Had they obeyed, or stayed outside?

With his wet hands he examined the edge of the fallen floor. He crawled around it, dragging his ax. Above the turmoil of the blaze he heard a new sound on the

other side of the barrier—a steady rap, rap, rap, like a giant woodpecker crazed by smoke.

He clawed ahead. It was hotter here, if that were possible. Through the smoke his eyes made out flashes of firelight, and he felt a draft from somewhere. He jammed into another broken piece of floor and drew back, wincing. The tapping came from behind it. He rolled over on his side and drew the ax up above his head.

Rotten wood crumbled under his blows. The barrier was not so tough that his ax couldn't smash it, and there were men behind it! How else explain the tapping? Three engine companies—three good companies and the new chief!

A board ripped off, and then another. Tom heard voices, some of them convulsed with fright. He thrust his glove through the opening.

"Come on!" he tried to order, but his lips made no sound. He tried again. Better, this time! "I say come on!" he belated.

He was pulling a man toward him—a limp fellow who sprawled on the floor. Tom jerked him away from the narrow opening.

"Crawl!" he bade. "Follow the line out!"

He reached in again. A steadier note emerged from the medley—a cool, commanding voice that old Tom recognized. That was Perkins, captain of Engine 18. He was pushing another limp body through the hole. Tom dragged it through and a pair of big pipemen squeezed after it.

"Hurt bad!" one shouted, as they dragged their mate across the hot floor.

Tom counted as the others came—nine—eleven—fourteen. Only the officers left now—captains or lieutenants, and the chief. His arm slipped, and he sprawled on the floor. His mind rebelled for a second. What was he doing here, anyhow? He tried to remember. Officers? Officers still left behind the wall?

Hazily he saw two men crawl past. Heat drove their hands and feet, flame howled close at their heels. Behind them he made out a third figure crawling through the niche.

"Hey!" he yelled, and the wadded handkerchief dropped from his teeth.

The figure paused. It was Perkins, the captain of Engine 18.

"Beat it!" he ordered. "You, Tom? Beat it!"

"Where's—" Foley began.

He could not remember what he had started to say, could not remember who was still left in the building. There was some one, he was sure of that much—some one he wanted to get out.

A new and terrifying wrench shook his prostrate body, and his ears roared with an immense vibration. There was a blast of shriveling air, and he felt fire above, below, all about. Beams were tumbling, and his head crashed sharply against a wall. A heavy, struggling object tumbled upon him and at once wriggled off.

Old Tom howled and raised himself on his elbows. He was conscious of a crushing sensation in his chest, and scalding water eddied about him; but he got to his feet, and his eyes opened painfully. Harsh light blinded them—violet, orange, yellow, crimson. Flame ripped and swerved, leaned down from above, bit at his face, leaped from two sides at his back and arms and legs.

His momentary vision, before he squeezed shut his baked lids, showed him a man lying three feet away—a young man—yes, by the holy hydrants, it was Benson—Benson who wrote the books! Old Tom drew back, then pushed one scorched hand forward doggedly.

"Dumb!" he muttered. He caught the new chief's borrowed slicker in his sore fingers, and dragged. "Spunky," he added, and the word caught, hot as a glowing coal, in his throat.

He moved sidewise. A stone wall—no going that way. He tried the rear and brought up sharply. More stone—he could tell from the rough, hot texture of it. He tried dizzily to comprehend. Stone? Then he had dropped through to the basement. So that's what the last crash was! He was in the basement, and he would have the devil of a time getting out!

Dropping his hold on Chief Benson's slicker, he fumbled blindly along the wall, away from the heart of the nearing flame. Then he remembered—remembered indistinctly that he had left something behind—something without which he dared not go out.

He crawled back three feet, falling to his elbows three times. At length his fingers found it—the body of a man—a fireman. Who it was didn't matter. It was a fireman needing rescue.

Old Tom gasped as he dragged back.

ward. His breath refused to travel his brittle throat. He crawled under an overhanging piece of wreckage. Hot here, and airless, but not so hot as in the path of the flame. For three seconds he rested. His eyes were of no value now. He must feel his way—feel it and hear it.

Heavy, this load he was dragging! Well, what of it? He had lugged out many a heavy man in his time. He wasn't so old—not so old that he couldn't yank a man out if he had to. He wormed forward until a cross draft struck his face. There was a hideous moment of intense heat, then an unbelievably cool breath. His lungs expanded.

Fresh air! Here was a way out, provided more walls or fallen floors did not bar it. He jerked at the collar of the other man's slicker.

A sudden cold, sharp gust hit his face. His groping left hand found a stairway, leading upward. The water on the floor was not so scalding here. It gave way to spray, a soft, cool spray, refreshing as a shower bath. He lifted his face thankfully and breathed deep.

The roar of the fire was subsiding in his ears. He could distinguish other noises now—noises that came out of nowhere to plague his tired mind. There was a long, low, unbroken rumble—pumping engines.

A voice:

"Here's Tom!"

"That ain't Tom," another answered.

"Damned if it ain't! Give him a hand, you! What's he got there? Sure! Sure he has! Hey, it's the new chief!"

"Careful!" a man warned. His tone was crisp. "That man's burned! Put him on the litter—careful there! Both of them—easy!"

Tom opened his eyes, and immediately closed them. Fresh air circulated once more through his lungs. Some one was coughing close at hand—coughing like a green Johnny-jump-up. Himself? He tried to choke it down. No use! He dropped back weakly into a warm, comfortable bed.

Again he heard friendly voices.

"It was Foley got the new chief out," the captain of Engine 91 was saying. "The mayor was standing right there by the cellar step, and saw him. Said Foley was too valuable a man to risk his life thataway."

"Going to make him chief to-morrow, and put Benson back to civilian adviser," said another voice.

Old Tom Foley stirred. He moved his bandaged hands.

"How is the fool kid?" he croaked.

"Benson? Fine, thanks to you!"

"Me? No—we got out together, me and him. We went in, and we got out. All the men safe? Three companies?"

"Somebody chopped 'em out."

"Must 'a' been the chief," declared old Tom. He turned over. To himself he added wearily: "They need all the boosts they can get, these here young fellers that's got spunk. Spunky but dumb!"

He closed his eyes. Another thought roused him just as he drifted back to sleep.

"Adviser?" he asked the captain. "What the devil does 'adviser' mean?"

## SOMETIMES

SOMETIMES you wear a look that once I knew;  
Before you speak, I know what you will say;  
A wraith of memory stirs—this place, and you,  
Were of my life in some forgotten day!

The parchment, life, was written on, I know,  
In æons past by us. Uncounted years  
Above it wrote their superscripts; below  
The writing stays, though dimmed by time and tears!

A blurred remembrance still survives in me  
Of that old life and you! Some vibrant string  
At your touch echoes far, faint melody,  
To which I thrill, almost remembering!

Yes, it is there, writ on some dim old page—  
That we two loved in some forgotten age!

*Roselle Mercier Montgomery*



# Wild Justice

KO-TU-LA, THE MURDERER, MIGHT HAVE DEFIED BOTH THE  
VENGEANCE OF THE HUNTERS AND THE MAGIC OF  
THE SHAMAN, BUT FOR THE WIT OF A WOMAN

By Don Cameron Shafer

WHILE Ko-tu-la, the Big One, lay stupid and heavy with sleep, gorged with the seal meat he had stolen, and therefore harmless for the moment, the tribal council of Eskimo elders sat in solemn judgment on his many misdeeds.

"Ko-tu-la the thief, Ko-tu-la the bully, Ko-tu-la the murderer—what shall we do with this man of evil?"

Like a Tartar overlord—short and thick-set, with round yellow cheeks, the oblique dark brown eyes of an animal, and a few coarse black hairs on lips and chin—Ah-we-lah, chief of this little Eskimo community, looked anxiously about into the thoughtful faces of the assembled hunters. All were swart Mongol faces, the older ones lined and sunburned, bitten deep by arctic gales and terrible cold, the younger faces full and round, at less solemn moments given to much joyous laughter.

"A dangerous man," spoke one.

"Better that one should die than all," suggested an old hunter.

The pale yellow light of burning seal oil from a moss wick in a stone lamp danced upon the curved snow ceiling of the igloo community house. In this uncertain light the hard, dark faces of the hunters stood out in sharp relief. Outside was darkness, except for the false light of distant stars—darkness and intense cold, with a bitter wind sweeping the snow-harried table-land behind the village, and sighing and moaning at the edge of the rocky cliff in the lee of which the bowl-shaped snow huts of the Eskimos were huddled.

"A confirmed thief must be banished," said the chief, "and he who strikes down his friend and brother must die."

"Aya-ah, it is so!"

"Such was the law of our fathers since the beginning of time, and it is justice."

"The weak must have laws to protect them from the strong, or they perish."

"Then make the sign," commanded the chief, "for banishment or for death."

All right arms were flung forward and down, with the fingers extended—a gesture more eloquent than any words.

"So be it," said the chief. "Ko-tu-la must die!"

Thus was the sentence of death pronounced upon the man who slept in his igloo at the other end of the village, neither knowing nor caring what was taking place.

It is one thing to pronounce such a sentence, and quite another to carry it out. Ah-we-lah, the leader, looked anxiously from one elder to another. There were men present who had scores to settle, and who ought to relish such an opportunity; but no one spoke. The great silence of the north crept within the igloo, and every drawn face was averted from the questioning black eyes of the chief.

"Are there no brave men here?" he asked.

"All are brave men in this Always Winter Land," said one.

"Then who will destroy this thief and murderer?"

No one answered.

"Ei-tu-lah?"

"I have two men children," the hunter replied softly. "They must be fed."

"That is true," nodded the chief, "and work enough for any man with game so scarce. Geh-tul-de?"

"My lance arm, as you know, is not yet healed where Nanook, the bear, raked me with her claws."

"I remember. Se-ka-le-tah?"

"I have not the strength," the man addressed admitted frankly.

"Who has?" asked another.

"I!" said a cracked and high-pitched voice. "I will kill him!" Poo-lo-ma, the aged and wizened shaman, struggled with all his scanty strength to rise to his feet, but his warped old legs were cramped from too long sitting, and he flopped back helplessly. "I will go myself and kill the Big One!" he quavered.

Like children, these primitive men of the north are easily amused and quick to change from sad to gay, from gravity to laughter. When the feeble old shaman in all seriousness volunteered for this seemingly impossible feat of arms, the very snow walls of the igloo fairly rocked with boisterous hilarity of the gathering.

"Hei-hei!" exclaimed the chief. "You kill the Big One? Why, you couldn't kill a louse!"

## II

AMONG such backward people, still in the stone age, struggling so hard to live, where there is no time or opportunity for any sort of mental advancement, it often happens that one of their number reverts back to the beast. A natural bully, taking advantage of his strength, soon learns that it is easier to steal meat and skins from his fellows than to hunt himself. This leads to fighting, and the result of fighting, sooner or later, is actual killing. Often a whole village is terrorized by such a brute until peace and safety necessitate the tribal sentence and an execution.

A bad man was this Ko-tu-la, dangerous as well as evil. He had taken the wife of Ei-tu-lah, and no one dared question his right to her or his might to hold her. The woman herself lived in fear of his dog whip, hating him, yet fearing him more. He had killed the brother of Se-ka-la-teh in a quarrel over a dead seal, which unquestionably belonged to the murdered hunter. Once he had even dared to take ten caribou hides from the chief himself.

Of late, indeed, the Big One had not troubled himself to go forth to hunt at all, but had lived, well and fat, upon the kills of others. When the loaded sledges came in, red with meat, he walked out and appropriated what he wanted.

"We will watch our chance," decided the chief. "When the opportunity comes, the one nearest him will strike."

"He had best be swift," sighed Geh-tul-de, "or never will he strike again!"

Though Ko-tu-la did not know that sentence had been passed upon him, he had been reading the hard eyes of the men he robbed too long not to realize that he must always be careful. He never left his igloo without a lance in his fist and a large knife by his side.

Among these Little People he was a giant, standing nearly six feet tall and weighing all of two hundred pounds. On the fur-covered sleeping platform of his big igloo, stripped to his swart skin, with his outer clothing beaten clear of snow and hung up to dry, he looked for all the world like a Japanese wrestler. A big, powerful man he was, with the ferocity of a polar bear, and unusually skillful with the primitive weapons of his people. He lived surrounded and guarded by nine big wolf dogs, over which he ruled with club and whip—an effective bodyguard of fierce and savage brutes, sleeping like sentinels in the tunnel entrance to his igloo. Thus an opportunity to carry out the sentence of the council was not so easily found.

As game grew less with the end of winter, even the Big One was forced to do a little hunting or go hungry. Meat was scarce, and whenever one of the hunters made a lucky kill he carefully hid it from the bully until it was hastily consumed. They did not bring in their dead seals until after dark, so that he could not see, and Ko-tu-la, fearless as he was, dared not crawl into the low entrance of any igloo in search of meat, lest he should be greeted with a fatal blow over the head from a seal dispatching club.

Ei-tu-lah, returning from a rabbit and ptarmigan hunt, came upon a herd of musk oxen. Alone and without his dogs he could not get near enough to the animals for a kill, so he hurried back to the village with the news.

"Musk oxen! Musk oxen!" His voice aroused the village even before he came running in. "Real meat for every one!"

"Where?" demanded Ah-we-lah.

"I will show you," Ei-tu-lah replied breathlessly. "Harness the dogs—get your bows and arrows!"

The very dogs caught something of the excitement, and did not hide and sulk when the harness was brought out. Though there was no danger of this game running far away, the eager hunters made a race of it.

"*Ok-suit, hurry, ok-suit! Ouk!*"

The long whips-cracked above the running dogs, hitched fan shape to the sledges, each dog on an individual trace. Foremost in the field of racing sledges was Ko-tu-la, the Big One, for he had learned by now that if he did not accompany the hunters they would hide the meat from him.

"Watch for a good chance!" shouted the chief, as he drew up beside Geh-tul-de. "Many a fatal accident happens on such a hunt as this," he added significantly.

"The whale gods protect him," declared Geh-tul-de.

"Not on land!"

More than a mile from the summit of the ridge where Ei-tu-lah had seen the animals feeding, the snow-covered ground became too rough and broken for the sledges. The hunters slipped their dogs and urged them on ahead, running and climbing after them as fast as possible.

Upon the rocky, wind-swept heights, which were almost mountains, the feeding musk oxen heard the distant barking of wild hunting dogs and the shouts of men. The adult animals ceased to paw at the wind-packed snow, beneath which they found their mossy food, and sniffed the cold air with nervous fear. Wolves were their natural enemies, and these dogs racing eagerly up the steep toward them were like wolves in size, color, and ferocity. Far behind and below the dogs, hardly more than moving black dots on the snow, came the hunters.

Curious creatures, these northern musk oxen—round bodied, heavily built animals, resembling both mountain goat and buffalo, with humped shoulders, short legs, and long, goatlike hair sweeping the snow just above the large hoofs. The horns are curved upward at the points, and flattened at the base to form a solid shield across the forehead.

There were sixteen oxen in the herd, grazing in a compact bunch, from which a young and vigorous bull now stepped out to inspect the threatening danger. He stamped and snorted in warning, and blew out his warm breath in a cloud of white steam, in which his wide nostrils gleamed a dull red.

Here in the open the beasts were at a disadvantage, although, even so, they were not to be easily pulled down by any wolf pack. They were not fast enough to outrun a wolf, but there was ample time to

seek a better and more defensible place to stand. The bull wheeled and ran, the rest of the herd stringing out behind him, half a dozen bleating calves struggling frantically to keep up with their mothers.

Up and over the rocks the oxen went, like so many mountain goats, until the rocky face of an overhanging cliff gave them the advantage they sought. Here the leaders whirled like trained soldiers and formed in a close-packed semicircular line, shoulder to shoulder, with their heads out. The tired calves were herded back against the cliff behind this living rampart.

In such a position, though dogs or wolves may roar and threaten, so long as its line of defense remains unbroken, like the well-known British square, a herd is safe. The black tips of those formidable horns are ever ready to rip and tear, while the long furry coats and horn-protected heads offer no vital part to threatening fangs. Even the great white wolves of the arctic do not waste much time trying to pull down a musk ox when the herd is at bay.

### III

BEFORE those sharp horns and heavy hoofs, accompanied by the deep-throated roaring of the herd at bay, the savage hunting dogs drew back. Stamping their black feet deep in the trampled snow, the outer circle of musk oxen tossed slaving heads until their horns rattled like a host of waiting spears. Their eyes blazed, and their breath spurted out in steam clouds and froze in a white rime upon their shaggy shoulders.

One inexperienced dog came too close, and slipped forward a few feet before he wheeled to leap back. A bull lunged forward and caught him on one curving point.

"Back! Keep back!" called the hunters to their favorite dogs, as they came swarming up over the rocks.

Foremost was Ko-tu-la, the Big One, his powerful bow already strung. A hundred feet from the massed herd when the bull jumped toward the luckless dog, he drew the bow back with all his strength, but the string snapped.

"*Hai-hi!*" he roared, as the chance was lost. "What demon has done this?"

Ah-we-lah saw that the bow was useless, and spoke privately to the hunters about him.

"Now—now is our chance!" he said.

"But he still has his lance," the chief was reminded.

"A lance cannot strike as far as an arrow."

"Maybe not," said one, "but he can catch any man that dares try it."

The frantic hunters were dancing in and out, screaming, shouting at their dogs, trying to stampede the oxen, so that they could get a shot at some vital part, but all to no purpose. With their protected heads and the heavy manes on their necks and shoulders, the animals were not to be killed with arrows, and no hunter dared risk an attack at close quarters with a lance.

The Big One had a rawhide walrus line coiled about his waist, and with a few quick turns he made the end of this fast to the butt of his lance. With a coil of the line in his left hand, he ran forward and cast the lance with all his strength at the shoulder of a big cow; but a tossing horn turned the point aside, and the weapon slithered harmlessly over her shoulders. Quickly he hauled the lance back with the line and prepared for another cast.

"Now!" warned the chief. "Now!"

As Ko-tu-la dashed in for the throw, Geh-tul-de, watching his chance, slipped in behind and thrust out his foot. The Big One fell sprawling, helpless, only a few feet from the tossing black heads. Instantly an infuriated bull leaped forward to take advantage of the fallen hunter's plight. A sharp point ripped through Ko-tu-la's heavy skin clothing, raking his ribs, and he felt himself being whirled upward into the air.

A man with less strength and less sheer courage would have been tossed back to the waiting horns of the other animals and quickly gored to death; but the Big One was not to die so easily. Even as he was swinging upward he dropped his useless lance and grasped the bull's black muzzle, and his big thumb and forefinger clenched in the red nostrils with the strength of death. With this weight the bull, dragged down to his knees, could not jump back into his place in the line, and the waiting dogs rushed into the break. The next instant the whole herd was streaming away in a mist of hoof-tossed snow, seeking another safety spot higher up the almost inaccessible heights.

Ko-tu-la, putting forth his strength and

grasping a curved horn with his left hand, threw the bull helplessly upon its broad back, and with a swift blow of his big knife stabbed it to the heart.

"Now!" he cried, getting slowly to his feet, with the dripping knife in his fist. "Now I shall settle with the man who tripped me!"

"It was an accident," protested Geh-tul-de in a panic of fear.

"There will be no more accidents because of you!"

#### IV

As the great ice pack locking the northern sea began to break up with the warm winds of spring, the beluga, or white whale, came swimming back in the open leads of dark water.

First came a milk-white male, fully twenty feet long leading his little herd, which included two snow-white cows and three or four smaller whales of the slaty gray color that indicates immaturity. These beautiful sea creatures rolled high out of the dark green water as they came up to breathe, and then moved swiftly and gracefully below the surface, their weird and ghostly forms looking mysterious and unreal in the arctic sea. When first seen, they were headed for a sheltered bay and the rocky inlet of a large stream, but the kayak of a seal hunter frightened them away. The older animals raised their white heads high out of the water to watch the hunter, more like seals than whales, then dived deep and disappeared.

"The white whales!" shouted the hunter. "The white ones have come back!"

The flesh and oil of the white whale is highly prized by the Eskimos, but it requires hard paddling and skillful handling of the frail skin kayaks to harpoon one of these speedy animals and kill it with a lance. Though all the hunters of the village, except the Big One, now more feared than ever, immediately shipped their whale hunting gear and gave chase, they could not overtake the fast swimming school. When they returned at dark, tired and discouraged, Ko-tu-la was the most disappointed.

"There is no meat that can compare with that of the white one," he said sadly.

"And no meat harder to get!" added a weary hunter.

"I can get one," boasted the Big One.

"Not sitting in your skin tent."



"I'll get me one," growled Ko-tu-la, "and not chase it all over the sea, either!"

The Big One wove a coarse mesh net of rawhide cords, weighted at the bottom with stones and supported at the top with inflated bladders. When it was done, he strung it across the narrow mouth of a rocky inlet where the white belugas fished at night. When the net was set to his satisfaction, he made a long, chanting prayer to the whale gods for a successful catch.

On the second morning the entire village was aroused by the joyous shouting of Ko-tu-la. From the shore it was plain to be seen that some large creature was fast in his net, for the water was churning and tossing in the mouth of the inlet. Then a big white whale broached, wrapped tightly in the rawhide cords. All ran forward eagerly to watch the Big One kill the entangled beluga, which had torn one end of the net loose from the rocks, and, flippers and flukes entangled, was thrashing down the inlet with the tide.

The Big One leaped from rock to rock, his lance poised, and behind him came the hunters from the near-by village.

"Now is the time," said the chief to Se-ka-le-tah, "to avenge the death of your brother!"

"But how?"

"Jostle him into the water—he cannot swim."

With much shouting and jumping, and great pretense of helping, Se-ka-le-tah dashed about Ko-tu-la, who was standing on the very edge of the rocks, thrusting his lance deep into the water at the ghostly white thing that twisted and turned in the deep. As the Big One leaned well out, the watching hunter saw his chance; and with a shriek of terror Ko-tu-la toppled from the rock and fell headlong into the icy sea.

"There!" cried Se-ka-le-tah triumphantly. "See if the whales can help you now!"

But the Big One, in falling, had struck upon the floating top line of the net, which was still fast by one end to the rocks, and this he grasped with both hands.

"Help!" he screamed.

"I'll help you," grinned Se-ka-le-tah, "as you helped my brother!"

With one slash of his knife he cut the line, and Ko-tu-la disappeared beneath the surface as the frantic beluga dragged him down, aided by the weighted net.

Now that the shore line was cut, the net drifted with the current upon a sub-

merged point of rock, and with this advantage the white whale tore it to pieces, freeing himself almost instantly. Ko-tu-la, dragged down into the deep water, had never let go the top line. He gasped, he choked, he nearly drowned; but, when the whale was free, the air-filled bladders popped him back to the surface again just in time.

"Help!" he gasped.

"Let grandfather whale help you," called Se-ka-le-tah.

The inflated bladders supported the drowning man as the tide rip bore him swiftly along toward a half submerged reef of rocks jutting out into the bay. Then Se-ka-le-tah saw that he had failed. For a minute or two he stood there, weak and trembling, the fear of death upon him, until it was certain that the Big One would drift upon the rocks and get ashore. Then he dashed back to the village with all possible speed.

With his big feet upon the solid shore, Ko-tu-la found both voice and strength. He knew that he had been pushed into the water, and he knew who had done it. He came racing back, bellowing in berserk rage, his knife in his wet fist.

"Where is he?" he roared. "Where is he?"

Some one pointed out, with trembling finger, a tiny dot of a man, dwarfed by distance, hurriedly climbing the cliff behind the village.

"There he is. Se-ka-le-tah is going to visit his wife's people."

"He will visit grandfather whale if I can catch him!" shouted Ko-tu-la.

Blind with rage and lust for vengeance, he dashed off in pursuit of the fugitive, not realizing that he could not hope to overtake an active man with so long a start.

"You see," sighed Ah-we-lah, so that all could hear, "it is impossible to kill him!"

"He is of the whales, and they are all powerful," said another Eskimo.

"Hei-hei!" chuckled old Poo-lo-ma, the shaman. "Not as powerful as the moon!"

"You say so!" scoffed the chief.

"I can prove it," declared the shaman, "by killing him myself."

"And how?"

"With the spell of death," answered old Poo-lo-ma seriously.

"Magic never killed a strong man yet."

"You shall see!" promised the shaman.

"You can try it," said the chief; "but I warn you—if it doesn't work, we shall have one dead man just the same."

"I am not afraid," grinned Poo-lo-ma.

## V

"WHY are you making all this hideous noise?"

The Big One came tumbling out of his skin tent, roaring because his nap was disturbed, to find the old shaman beating a drum before his door, and making such a din that it set all the dogs to barking.

"Ho!" answered Poo-lo-ma. "What else could it be but the song of death?"

"Then go and sing it before the door of the sick, and let me sleep, lest I rap you over the head with a seal club and throw you into the sea!"

"As ever and always, I sing it before the door of him who is about to die!" said the shaman.

"I never felt better in my life," bellowed the Big One. "I never felt more like killing—"

"The spirit of life is about to leave your great body!"

"If you weren't an old man," shouted the Big One, a little frightened for all his loud voice, "I would wet my knife in your blood!"

"That would save me a lot of work and trouble," sighed Poo-lo-ma. "Then I could go directly to the moon and arrange for your death, without all this singing and drumming."

"But I tell you again, I am not going to die!"

"I repeat," persisted the old man, "that you are!"

"I never felt stronger—"

"Your strength will flow from your body as the hardest ice melts in the warm summer sun," chanted the old sorcerer. "The food that keeps your body strong will turn sour in your mouth. The water you drink will be bitter, and your body will reject all nourishment. Your arm will grow thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker, and so you will waste away and die!"

There was just enough ignorant and barbaric superstition in the Big One to make him afraid.

"Stop!" he cried.

"You who have stolen so much will find that the moon is stealing your strength!"

"Stop!"

"You who have killed must now die in your turn. The moon will destroy you!"

"I am of the whales" returned Ko-tu-la bravely. "I am not afraid of the moon."

"The spell of death is upon you!" chanted the old shaman. "You shall not eat, nor sleep, nor rest—"

In his tent again, resting on the warm, soft robes, Ko-tu-la felt just as well and strong as he ever did. After the first wild panic of inner fear had passed, and nothing happened to alarm him, he tried to pass it all off as a huge joke.

"That crazy one!" he laughed, but there was little real mirth in his voice. "That old fool, putting the curse of death upon me!"

"Then you will die," said the woman.

"I shall be in no hurry about it!"

"Sooner than you think," she warned, her black eyes very wide.

"He promised that the choicest piece of seal meat would grow bitter in my mouth!"

"We shall see." She was a clever woman, and she hated him more than he suspected. "Poo-lo-ma came from the lower village by the leaning rock, and I have often heard my people tell of a wicked man there who wasted away and died with the moon spell upon him."

"I'll waste away," said Ko-tu-la sharply, "if you don't get some food ready!"

"You won't eat it!"

"When did I ever refuse to eat?"

"But this time—" she began.

"This time I shall eat more than ever, just to prove that all words fly two ways from the mouth of that crazy fellow!"

She hung the stone kettle over the seal oil lamp and filled it with snow to melt. While this was heating she cut from the body of a newly killed seal a quantity of the best meat, and placed it in the kettle to boil. While she was doing this, and the Big One was waiting hungrily and impatiently, he busied himself scraping down the wooden haft of a new seal harpoon.

"Hei!" he exclaimed in pain and something of fear. "I have cut myself!"

"It is but the beginning," said the woman quietly. "Bad luck is upon you."

"I have cut myself before, and nothing happened."

"But this time—"

"Forever hold your tongue," he ordered, "and bring me my meat!"

The Big One ate in the approved manner of his people. He picked out a juicy piece of the half boiled seal meat, seized one end with his teeth, and quickly cut it off with a stroke of his knife. For a second he sat there, his jaws locked, his black eyes very wide and unusually bright, his swart face visibly paling. Then he spat the meat out on the trodden snow. Even as he stared down at it, a wolfish dog lurched forward from the entrance with eager jaws and gulped it down.

"This meat—it isn't right!" he said hoarsely, his thick throat convulsing.

"It is fresh seal meat, cooked in the usual way."

"Then something has happened to it. It is bitter as gall!"

"You imagine things," replied the woman, tasting of a piece.

Ko-tu-la tried another bite, and it followed the way of the first. Without a word he got up from his seat, his face beaded with sweat, and walked out into the open. There he found all the village assembled before his door to stare at him.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"We have come," spoke the chief, "to ask where you want your body placed when you have done with it."

"I haven't done with it yet!"

"We will wait," answered Ah-we-lah, sitting down on a convenient rock.

And all the others sat down beside him, as if they knew they would not have to wait very long.

## VI

FROM that hour the Big One knew that he was going to die. When, in his hunger,

he tried to eat, the meat was acrid and nauseating in his mouth, and if he managed to swallow a morsel his stomach instantly rejected it. Even the water was bitter and undrinkable.

When he left his tent to face the waiting villagers, no one spoke to him. Already he was, to them, a dead man. It was the most interesting and exciting thing that had ever happened in their lives, and they abandoned everything else to watch him and talk about it. The strength flowed from Ko-tu-la's giant body, the flesh wasted from his bones, and in a few days he was dead.

"His furs and his gear," decided the chief, "go to you, Poo-lo-ma, for accomplishing this magic."

When the old shaman went to the dead man's tent to get the things, he found the woman tying up the last of the valuable robes and skins.

"Surely I have earned them," she argued, "living with that beast!"

"But the chief gave them to me," protested the old man.

"You may have his hunting gear, and that is all," she told him.

"I will not pass words with you," answered the shaman. "I shall take them!"

"Try it," she invited, being a strong woman and set in her way.

"Be careful!" warned old Poo-lo-ma. "Do not get me angry, or with the same moon power with which I destroyed—"

"Huh, you and your moon power!" she scoffed. "If I hadn't cooked the seal's gall with the meat, and dropped a little of it in his drinking water, the Big One would even now be amusing himself by breaking you into little pieces!"

## A FIREPLACE FIRE

Who kindles for me a fireplace fire,  
Kindles the light of an old desire;  
Kindles a flame from ashes gray,  
The gallant dream of a bygone day.  
Your guest I wait, where the candles glow—  
Have you forgotten the long ago?

Who kindles for me a fireplace fire  
Kindles no stern funereal pyre;  
Fervent loving and olden games  
Shall flash again in the glowing flames.  
Your guest I wait, while my whole soul yearns—  
Touch of a match, and our youth returns!

*L. Mitchell Thornton*

# The Lady of the Road House

THE AMAZING ADVENTURE THAT BEFELL JOHN ABERCROMBIE  
WHEN HE WENT TO ST. LOUIS FROM HIS FINE FRUIT  
RANCH IN THE MAGIC VALLEY OF TEXAS

By Ralph E. Mooney

**J**OHN P. ABERCROMBIE had a romance in his life, when he met his wife. It was a regular one—the sort you find in a book. People don't understand about romance. For instance, some will say there isn't any. Now that just leaves you nothing to go on, nothing to live for. It's crazy, too, because there is romance. Life is full of it. The thing to do is look for it.

Abercrombie was never troubled about it. He always knew he was going to find romance some day, and sure enough he did. Some have said he found more than enough, but he was ready for it when it came, and so was able to make the most of it.

Now suppose he hadn't been ready—he'd be sore, and he'd say there was no such thing, wouldn't he? That's the difference. He was Johnny on the spot, able to wrestle, fight, or run, as proved necessary—ready to play for chalk, money, or marbles, as the saying goes.

He began getting ready when he was seventeen. He was at high school in Harlingen then, and he began to see that he was cut out for adventure. He can't tell how he knew it, except for a sort of feeling that came over him. He knew he'd be tested, and if he wanted to meet the test he'd have to be up on a lot of things, such as handling a pistol, boxing, wrestling, and fighting with swords.

"Fighting with swords!" somebody said once.

"Certainly," answered John. "How did I know but I might be called to one of those old countries where they don't use pistols?"

Well, pistols were easier to find than

swords. John P. Abercrombie lived with his folks on a thirty-acre fruit ranch in what is known as the Magic Valley of Texas. It was near McAllen, which is a little way from Brownsville, in case you don't know. The real wild days in the valley were over then, but everybody had weapons on hand, and dad didn't object to lending one of his and teaching John how to use it. In a few months John got to be a good shot, and he learned some tricks about drawing a gun, too.

There was a Y. M. C. A. at McAllen, and the secretary knew about wrestling. He taught John all he could, and they got a book and worked out some more by themselves. John wanted the Y. M. C. A. man to try fencing, but he laughed, and said it was crazy; so John hunted around until he made friends with a little West Point lieutenant at Brownsville, and they practiced every Sunday afternoon that John could get down there. Boxing he picked up from a Mexican at Falfurrias. This Mexican was a professional, and had fought all around the States under the name of Lefty Byrne.

John did most of his training at night or on Sunday. It was just after the irrigation began, and he had to spend most of his time helping dad make sweet and sour grafts, and transplant trees, and all the things you do around a young citrus grove; but he hung at it and practiced all he could.

At the end of five years he was six feet tall and had good broad shoulders. He could shoot fine and wrestle fine, and could hit a hard lick without swinging like a road gate to get ready. He could hit straight out and still keep covered up. He couldn't



fence so well, but, the way it turned out, that wasn't necessary. None of those people in St. Louis came at him with a sword. If they had, it's probable they'd have got a surprise.

But wait a minute now! John didn't go to St. Louis so quick as all that. In fact, when he got to be twenty-two, and saw that he was all ready for excitement and emotion, he also saw that there didn't seem to be the least chance of his finding any. The irrigated district was settling up fast with orchard owners and truck gardeners, and the valley was quieter every day. Of course, Mexico was just over the border, and a person could easily get in trouble there, but with no romance to it. It would be just a fight. Nobody gets any thrill out of a Mexican, do they?

Well, John didn't give up hope. He believed his was coming soon or late, and he kept on practicing, until finally the big war came.

"Here's my chance!" he said; but just as the United States declared in, dad died and left mother with the thirty acres of trees and him.

What was there to do? Nothing but just say it wasn't his chance, after all. He did try to get drafted, but a county judge said he was the kind that was needed more at home than in the trenches. He was a trained citrus man, and they'd just discovered that oranges and lemons have these vitamins in them; so they put him in Class E, or even further off, and all he saw of the war was in the newspapers. Well, there wasn't much romance in trench fighting, anyhow, was there?

So John just worked and waited. In 1922, mother died. John was up early one December morning to see if there'd been a frost, as threatened, and he heard her call. When he got to her, there she lay, just as if she'd gone off to sleep again. John went and telephoned for the doctor, but when he came he said he couldn't do anything.

Now, here's the queer thing—just when John was all broken up over her going, and his having to live all alone on the ranch, so that he wasn't thinking of romance at all, it began.

When the lawyer looked over their papers, he found a sort of will from her which said that John was to go to St. Louis. She owned a piece of property there, and he must be sure and go and see it and make

up his mind whether to hold on to it or sell. How's that? Isn't it like a book?

## II

St. Louis—there's a town for you! High buildings and all—and romance! Why, John would walk along a street and see a hard-looking man talking to a police officer, and he could tell in a minute that they were framing up one of these big political scandals. Or he'd see an old fellow with pink cheeks and a white mustache, and a gray suit on, hurrying along and chewing a cigar. That was a big financier, knocking off a million for himself with stocks and bonds.

There were limousines coming up to the curb with chauffeurs and letting out ladies that looked a little sad. There were newsboys that knew all about the race tracks. There were young fellows not a year older than John, who looked as if they were worth two or three million dollars. Some of them had little mustaches and drove around in roadsters, flirting with girls.

There were thousands of girls, all looking mysterious, as if they had troubles they couldn't tell about. Some looked kind of pert, but most of them were serious, and had their eyes straight ahead. Once in awhile John would look up at a street car window, and would see one that looked so sad and worried he wished he could butt in on her trouble and square things up for her.

A girl like that—one that looked sad and worried—passed through the hotel lobby the night before he was to start home. She stared straight at him. She sort of stopped and then went on, looking back a little. It seemed as if she wanted to talk to him, but was too much of a lady to step right up and introduce herself. She went off down a passage, and he thought she was gone; but in a minute he saw her standing over behind a pillar, where nobody could see her but him. She jerked her head for him to come on. John could hardly believe it, but there she was, and while he looked she jerked her head again.

He got up and went over to the pillar, and she walked down the passage to one of the street doors. It was one of those whirligig doors, and just before she went through it she looked back and nodded. John felt kind of chilly all up and down his back.

Going through that door, he noticed

that as it turned it shut out the music of the orchestra and the kind of warm, perfumed smell of the lobby. Then John was out on the street, where a cold January wind was blowing. It gets colder than Christmas in St. Louis sometimes.

She was walking away real slow. He went up to her, and she said:

"Oh, there you are! I didn't think you were coming."

He took off his hat.

"I wasn't sure you wanted me, miss. What can I do for you?"

"Put on your hat," she said real sharp. "Keep walking along, or I might get in trouble."

Then he knew that it had come. He hadn't been able to believe it. A big town like St. Louis upsets a man. John never thought anybody but the lawyer he was sent to was going to pay any attention to him, but here was a girl asking him to go with her and admitting that she was in trouble. He put on his hat and took her arm, and they went along a street.

"Miss," he said, "what's up? If you want me to help you, you better give me an idea what to expect."

"Don't worry, honey," she answered. "It's all right if we just keep walking."

But he could tell she was nervous. She hung on to his arm and squeezed it tight. It's a pity you couldn't have heard her voice; it was so kind of delicate and sweet, like little silver bells.

"Gosh!" she says. "You're an enormous big man!"

"Listen here," he told her. "I'll keep walking if you say so, but if anybody's apt to bother you now's your time to get rid of them. Just tell me who it is, and we'll face 'em down right here. I don't like running away!"

"Crazy!" she said. "It's the police. You don't want to argue with them!"

John stopped.

"See here now," he said. "Who ever got you tangled up with the police, little girl? What dirty work was put over on you?"

She looked up at him, tired and pathetic. Her eyes, in the light of the street lamps, were like little circles of the sky on a clear night down in the Magic Valley.

"Don't you understand, honey?" she said. "They watch me awful close!"

Just then the wind gave a terrible blast, and she shivered. He saw the poor thing

didn't have on half enough clothes for that climate.

"Here," he said, "we've got to get inside somewheres."

"D'you mind getting a cab, honey?"

"Of course not."

There was a taxicab coming along, and he stopped it and put her inside.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

"Just a minute," says John, "until I ask the lady."

He got in with her. It was nice and warm.

"Now, girl," he said, "I want you to trust me. I can see you're in trouble, and I want you to know you can count on me to help you get out of it. As a man, I'm ready to do anything you say. If money will help you, why, I've got ten thousand dollars right here in my pocket that's yours if you need it. Now tell me what to do."

"Ten thousand dollars!" she says.

He had sold the lot that day, and he had the money with him.

"Yes," he told her, "and don't be afraid to tell me what the trouble is. I'm just a lone Texan without any living relatives, and you can talk to me like you would to a brother. Tell me what it is that's going on to-night. I know it must be something pretty big, or you wouldn't be speaking to strange men in hotels."

"You've got ten thousand dollars with you?" she asks. "Right with you?"

"Right here," he said.

He took her hand and let her feel where it was pinned in his inside vest pocket. All of a sudden she began to cry.

"You're just a police officer," she said, "trying to get the kid and me in trouble!"

"No, I'm not," he told her. "I'd like to see the man that would set the police on you! And if you got a kid, why, I'll help you take the little fellow down to Texas, where nobody can harm either of you."

"Yes, you are an officer," she insisted. "You got a badge hid somewhere." Real quick she felt inside his lapel and patted his coat pockets. "No," she said. "I believe you're on the level."

"Of course I am, but I don't blame you for being suspicious. A person has to be in a big city like this. Now, tell me where you want to go, and on the way you can tell me how to help you. I won't leave you until everything is set straight."

"I'll tell the driver," she said.

She opened the little window, leaned

out to the driver, and said something to him. John saw him look at her real quick and then nod. She closed the window, and they drove off. She began to cry again.

"Don't do that," he told her. "If you'll trust me, your troubles are over."

"Oh!" she moaned. "I hardly know how to tell you all about it. Oh, it surely is terrible! I don't believe I can tell you."

"Of course you can," says John. "First, I'd like to know your name. Mine's Abercrombie—John P. Abercrombie."

"Well, mine's Rose," she says.

"Rose what?"

"Rose Turner."

"And where's your husband, Mrs. Turner?"

"My husband?"

"You said you had a kid," he laughed, "so I know you're married. Where is he? Why ain't he helping you when you're in trouble?"

She looked out of the window a minute, shaking her head. She was feeling so bad she hardly knew what to say.

"Oh!" she began. "Oh, him! Oh, he's the cause of all of it. It was him put the police on me; and then—oh, I can't tell you the half of it, it's so terrible!"

"Take me to see him," John said. "I'll guarantee he does right by you."

"Huh? We mustn't do that," she said.

"He'd kill us. Say, he's a crook, a terrible crook. He—he's got men to help him. You couldn't do anything against him."

"We'll see about that," John told her.

Just then the taxicab stopped and the driver opened the window.

"I've got to get gasoline," he said.

"Only be a second."

It was at a filling station—a little brick one with the windows all frosty and just a few dim lights. The wind was booming. While one man filled the tank, John noticed their driver talking to a fellow in the doorway—a man with one leg, who seemed to be the boss. John noticed it special, because he didn't like the looks of either of them. He had a feeling there was something afoot.

When they drove away, he said to Rose:

"Now what can I do to help you tonight? We'll let your husband go till later."

She didn't answer right away. She coughed once or twice and cried some more.

"Well," she said, "it's like this—I am

in trouble, though how you guessed it I don't know. And—but I can't tell you any more. Anyhow, just riding with me you're helping me. You don't know what it means to me. Pretty soon, when we get where we're going, why, maybe there'll be something you can do. I'll have to tell you then."

"That suits me," John said. "It's your game, and I'll play it any way you say."

### III

WELL, they went along for quite awhile, and all of a sudden she took hold of his hand.

"What would your husband say to this?" he asked.

"Listen!" she said. "I hate him. Didn't he get me in trouble? You're lots nicer than him. Kiss me!"

You've no idea how that made John feel; but he understood what was behind it.

"Girly," he said, "you're all upset, or you wouldn't say that. I ain't going to take advantage of you. Wait till we've settled up with that skunk of a husband, and I might have something to say to you along those lines."

About then was when he noticed that another automobile had been following along behind for some time. He began to watch it pretty carefully. All of a sudden it came up beside them, and then swung around in front, so that their driver had to stop. John saw men with guns drop down from it—three of them. They came around to the door, two standing off together and covering driver and cab, while one came up to the door.

"Robbers!" John said.

"Oh, God!" says Rose. "They are my husband's men. Don't resist them, or they'll kill you sure!"

"I won't," John says.

The man opened the door.

"Come out and hand over, big boy," he said. "Keep your hands up high!"

"All right," John answered, pretending to be scared.

Well, he knew he had to do some quick acting, or Rose would be in worse trouble than ever. He wasn't long making up his mind. As he got on the step, he saw how to handle it. He just made a dive forward and fell on the near man's pistol arm. The man was a little runt with no more strength than a baby, so before he could

say "Boo!" John had a crotch hold on him, and hoisted him up and threw him at the other two. You might say a man couldn't do that and not get shot, but John had Rose to protect, and he did it.

Down all three went in a pile, and he made one jump and three kicks, and they were all knocked out. He grabbed their guns. As he straightened up, he noticed a man at the wheel of their car. He turned two guns on him.

"Git!" John yelled. "Out of here! Go tell Mr. Turner he's got trouble on his hands!"

Which that driver did. As the engine roared from starting up, John got a half sight of somebody coming up behind him. He spun and ducked, and the man just missed hitting him. John clubbed one of the guns and uppercutted the fellow with the butt, and he went to sleep. It was their taxi driver, and he had a monkey wrench in his hand.

Rose came out, trembling.

"What did you hit him for?" she says.

"He was coming to help you."

"No, he wasn't," John explained. "He fixed up this holdup."

"Oh, never!" she says. "I know him."

"Listen, Rose," John told her. "You're just a woman and you ain't been around like I have. I saw it all. This treacherous hound talked to the boss of the filling station and got him to tell your husband where you were going. Then your husband sent these men after us. Now, let's get out of here. You get back inside, and I'll drive the cab."

She looked at him, kind of frightened.

"Where are we going?"

"Wherever you say," he told her. "I'm a stranger here, and you'll have to tell me what turns to make. We'll go and do whatever it was you wanted to do when you first asked me to help you. Come on, before any of your husband's men can see what becomes of us!"

He put the guns on the driver's seat and started the cab. She opened the window and told him what way to go.

After half an hour or so they were out in the country. They turned up a long drive over a hill, and came to a big old wooden building that was partly house and partly shed. It was lighted up, but the lights were dim.

"What's this?" John asked.

"This is the Apollo Inn," Rose says.

"It's what they call a road house. Now listen—will you promise not to tell anybody if I let you in on my secrets?"

"Certainly."

"Well, here's what I've got to do." She began to whisper. "I've got to get some papers to-night. If I can get them, why, I'll have my husband in my power. He's got me in his power now, but these papers will make him let me alone and give me power over him, see?"

"Fine!" said John. "I'll help you."

"Well, but here's the trouble—the man that has the papers is afraid to give them up. He's afraid of my husband's men, see? So I got to buy them papers. That was why I asked you to help me. I had all my arrangements made to get the money from a friend, but he ditched me at the last minute; and I had to see this fellow to-night. All I need is just a few hundred dollars—just a few hundred."

"I'll buy them for you, Rose. You can call it a loan."

"Honey, you're all right! Well, then, let's go in. Now be careful in here. Don't bring those guns, because if anybody thought you had them there'd be trouble. What we should do is to walk right in and turn to the right, up the stairs. As soon as we get up there, we'll go into a room and send for this man with the papers. We'll make our bargain with him and slip out again; only then, thanks to you, I'll be a free woman."

They went up on a little porch and in through a rickety old door. A man looked at them first before he let them in.

It was terribly bare inside—just rafters and joists, with a few curtains hung around here and there. There was a bar along one side of the big room, and there were lots of plain wooden tables and chairs. A man was playing the piano and two people were dancing. There were about twelve others, sitting at tables. Most of them looked sort of weary and disgusted.

Rose and John went upstairs. The building was old, and the stairs creaked. They went into a room. It was somebody's bedroom, but there were some chairs and a table there, for eating or drinking.

A waiter came in. Rose talked to him for a minute, telling who it was she wanted to see.

Pretty soon the man came—Small, his name was supposed to be. The waiter followed Small and put down some drinks.



"Mr. Small, this is my friend Mr. Abercrombie," Rose said. "Mr. Abercrombie, there is some whisky Mr. Small had in his room against sickness. I was sure you'd need it after that long, cold drive. I don't drink it myself."

"Well," John said, "if you don't, I don't, either. From this day on I'll never touch a drop. Besides, if we're going to talk business, I need a clear head."

Small drank his and laughed. In a minute he got to laughing terrifically.

"What's the joke?" John asked.

"Oh, I was just thinking of something funny," Small said. "It's a kind of joke on Rose. Never mind! Excuse me a moment."

He went out.

"Well," said Rose, "it certainly gave him a laugh, didn't it? Say, I know you need a drink. If you want, just for this once, I'll take a little sip with you, so you can keep from taking cold."

John shook his head.

"No, Rose," he said. "I'm better off without it, and you're too fine a lady for it."

She blushed.

"You're an awful kiddler!"

"Rose, if you didn't have a husband, do you know what I'd be saying to you now? Do you?"

"Oh, go on!" she answered.

He meant it, though. Every time he looked at her little face he fell deeper in love with her.

#### IV

WELL, that was some occasion—out there in that old barn of a road house, with the January wind roaring outside, and Rose across the table smiling at him, while he had no idea where he was or what he was going to do, except help her. He wanted it to last forever; but it didn't.

Pretty soon Small came back.

"Excuse me," he said again, "but I had to tend to something. Now what was it you wanted? Business, you said?"

"We came after those papers," said Rose. "You know what I mean, Harry."

"What papers?" says Small.

"You know—the ones about my husband, Mr. Turner. Come across, Harry—it's all right. Mr. Abercrombie is going to help me. He's got real money on him. Show him, Mr. Abercrombie."

Well, John didn't like this Harry Small's

looks. He wasn't a fellow you could trust very far. He had damp hands, John noticed, and hands like that can always be distrusted. Lots of Mexicans have them.

"I'll show money when Mr. Small shows what he's got," John said.

Small laughed again.

"That's fair enough," he said, and he got up and walked toward the door. Then he stopped. "But say, I got to be careful. How do I know this guy won't spill the beans?"

"Why, Harry," says Rose, "ain't I with him? Ain't he my friend?"

Small took an envelope out of his pocket, looked at it, and shook his head.

"These papers could mean a lot of trouble," he said. "I ain't sure I ought to let you have them."

"That depends on how much you need money," John said. "We've got money. If you want it, pass them over and you can get it."

Just then John saw the reflection of something white in the curve of the glass of whisky in front of him, and he knew what it was. It was the reflection of a face. There was a man behind him somewhere that he didn't know about. Phew! But it was no time to shiver. John had to think quick again.

"We're here to buy if you want to sell," he said, pretending not to notice anything.

He put his foot in the rung of his chair and gave it a shove backward, and it went skating over the bare floor. At the same time John jumped sidewise and whirled. There was a man standing there with a little black club in his hand. The chair had knocked into him, and he surely did look foolish.

John looked at Small.

"Ah, ha!" he said. "So that's the kind you are!"

"What's the matter?" Small says. "This fellow's only a waiter."

"Coming to put that black thing under my ear," John answered. "Rose, don't believe him! This man Small is out to trick you. He doesn't mean to sell those papers at all."

While John was talking, the supposed waiter looked at Small and Small looked at him. Then they both reached for guns, and one yelled:

"Stick 'em up!"

That put the turn up to John, didn't it? All this time his own gun had been waiting

on his hip. Nobody knew about it. He made the fastest draw of all his life and beat them by half a second.

"Hands up!" he ordered.

Their mouths fell open, and they stood looking at him.

"Turn around," he said. "Now, Rose, tie up that waiter's hands, and then we'll give Mr. Small a little treatment that'll produce your papers *pronto*. I haven't lived near Mexico for nothing!"

But that didn't work. Small let out a yell, and the waiter whirled around and shot at John. He had his gun up his sleeve, and drew it by whipping his arm down.

John saw what was coming, and knew better than to wait. The waiter missed that one shot, and never got a chance for another, because John had been covering him from less than fifteen feet away.

Small jumped out of the door, yelling, and fired at John from the hall. John dropped him as he tried to dodge after shooting.

John saw there was lots of trouble on hand, but he made up his mind to take a chance. He ran out to the hall and got the papers out of Small's inside coat pocket. Small was only wounded, and tried to grab John, but John jumped up and got away from him.

*Bang, bang, bang!* A lot of men were running up the stairs and coming along the hall. It was one big hall that ran the length of the building. The nearest men were about forty feet away. Rose was at the door of Small's room. John grabbed her around the waist, took her back inside, slammed the door, and bolted it.

"Come on!" he said. "You mustn't be mixed up in anything like this!"

It sounded like a cavalry charge, there were so many outside. The door was nearly splintered to pieces with bullets while John looked at it. He ran to a window, but he realized that they were on the second floor, and Rose couldn't jump.

"Go on!" she said. "Jump! I'll be all right."

John looked at her and saw something in her eyes that made him feel like yelling. She liked him! Up to now she had been kind of hard and unbelieving, but she had changed.

He faced the door.

"I ain't going to leave you, Rose," he said. "You mustn't be mixed up in anything like this!"

"Oh, God!" she said, and then sobbed. "Here! This way, quick!"

She went straight at one of the walls of the room. For half a second John wondered what she was doing. Then he remembered that the waiter had come into the room behind his back, without using the regular door. There was another—a secret one. Rose opened it.

John grabbed her and carried her along a little passage, about ten steps. They came out in another room. It was empty, and at one window was one of those rope fire escapes, all coiled up and ready.

John hoisted the window, threw out the rope, and got a hold with his right hand. With his left he lifted Rose and swung her out. It surprised the poor girl, and she screamed. The men came after them, but before anybody even got to the window, John had slid down with her.

He carried her to the taxicab. They fired at him, but he shot out the lamp over the entrance door, so they couldn't see a thing out there. He put Rose in the cab and picked up the three pistols on the front seat. He wasn't sure how to start the cab engine, but you'll remember that the road house was on the top of a hill. John emptied one gun at the doors and windows of the road house, and then grabbed the car and pushed it, and turned the steering wheel at the same time. As soon as it was started downhill, he jumped aboard, put it in high gear, and switched on the spark. The engine started, and off they went.

When they got halfway down to the main road, a touring car loaded with men came after them, shooting. John fought them all the way down. Near the big road they tried to come up beside him and crowd him into the ditch, but his shooting was good. He hit their driver, and they went off the road instead of him.

He remembered which way to turn to get back to the city, and pretty soon they passed a taxicab stand. John had an idea then. He drove around the next corner, left the cab there, took Rose back, and got in another one. He gave the driver the name of his hotel.

"Rose," he said, "here's your papers. You're a free woman now, but, if you'll take my word, you better turn those papers over to the police. It's time your husband was punished, if those are the kind of people he goes with."

John put the envelope in her lap. She

was crying, but at that she kind of choked and sat up and looked at him. She picked up the envelope.

"My God!" she said. "Was this what you went into the hall for? Why—why, he was just bluffing. These ain't the papers. Look, it's only advertisements!"

"Stop!" John said to the driver. "We'll go back and get them."

"No!" says Rose. "Oh, my—would you do that for me, honest?"

"Of course," John said. "I started out to get those papers, and I'll get them yet."

"Oh, honey, it ain't necessary! My husband—that was him with the club—the man that Small said was a waiter. That was Mr. Turner, and you shot him!"

That made John mad.

"What a low-down hound that Small was," he says, "working with your husband all the time!"

"Honey, we're all low down—Small, Turner and me. Oh, my God!"

"Don't say things like that, Rose! You made a mistake when you married him, maybe, but you couldn't help him fooling you."

She began to laugh. She was hysterical.

"A free woman!" she said. "By glory, I'm free, all right! You certainly fixed things up. Phew!"

"Don't mention it," John said. "It was no trouble."

"No trouble—oh, my! Say, where are we going now?"

"I'm going to take you down to my hotel and get them to put you up in a room until morning—unless you want to go somewhere else. I just didn't know anything different to do, and I thought we better get somewhere."

She looked and looked at him. Her eyes were bright, but full of tears.

"Gosh," she said, "you're some man! Well, say, you needn't worry about my husband. I don't feel bad about you shooting him. He was awful rough with me."

"I understand," John said. "The thing for you to do is come to Texas with me and forget about him. I'll pay your fare and get you a nice place to board. Some day, when this is all settled, why, maybe you'll want to think about getting another husband; but I don't want to force you to do anything you don't want to do. No, siree, I'm not that kind of a *hombre*."

"Gosh!" was all she said.

"So in the morning you must get your little boy—"

"My little boy? Oh, the kid! You didn't understand about that. 'The Kid' was Turner's nickname. I said that when I thought you was a policeman. I thought—oh, gosh, Mr. Abercrombie!"

"You haven't any children?"

"No, sir. I have to admit I've lied to you a little. I was mistaken in you, John. I didn't make you at all. I've been a prize boob—first prize!"

## V

WELL, that made it easier. They went to the hotel, and John paid for her room that night. Next morning he was down bright and early, waiting for her. He always got up about five, of course.

Rose was a late sleeper. She didn't show up until half past six. Then she came down and started out of the lobby. She was surprised when John popped up and stopped her.

"Oh, I was going after my clothes at the boarding house," she said. "I didn't think you'd be up."

"Forget the clothes," he told her. "We'll get you a new outfit to-day. It won't be healthy for you to go around to your boarding house. Look here!"

He showed her the morning paper. It had a big piece in it about that fracas at the Apollo Inn road house. It seemed as if the place was the headquarters of one of these gangs of gunmen and bootleggers. Rose told him later that she knew her husband was bad, but she never dreamed he was as bad as he was until just a few days before she met John. Then she began bargaining with this Small, who was one of the gang, to try and get power over her husband so she could reform him. She couldn't bear the idea of his going to jail eventually, she said. Imagine how shocked she was when John showed her in the paper where it said he had been in jail seven times in the last five years! Turner had always told her he was off on business trips, she said.

Well, after John shot up the place, and part of the gang chased him and were wrecked, the others thought that he was a fellow in another gang, and had stolen Mrs. Turner on purpose, so they went out gunning after the other gang. There had been murder and bloodshed all over St. Louis that night. It ended with the other bunch

setting fire to the Apollo Inn and winging a couple of members of Turner's gang.

The police were bound to be active that day, John reasoned, so after breakfast they just traveled around in taxicabs and didn't show their faces anywhere except in stores. In the evening their train left, and with Rose on John's arm, wearing her new clothes and a wide hat, nobody suspected her of being connected with the notorious Mr. Turner or Mr. Small, either; so she went down to Texas with John.

Well, it might seem cold-blooded of her but they got married in San Antonio. The fact is that her husband never was much account, and had made her miserable all her life, so she didn't care if John had killed him—especially, she said, when he did it in self-defense. She wasn't willing to marry at first, though.

"John P.," she said, on the way down, "listen—suppose I was to tell you that I—I'd been fooling you all along that night? That there wasn't any papers, and that I was just doing a trick to rob you, being you told me you had money? What do you say to that?"

"Well," John said, "what difference would it make? You didn't go ahead and do it, did you? Anyhow, I suppose your husband made you do such things after you'd found out he wasn't straight."

"Those things and worse," she said. "Oh, John P., I can't marry you!"

"I say you can," he told her.

"Gosh!" she said. "What a swell old outfit you turn out to be! You're some man, John!"

So she went down to the Magic Valley a bride. She wasn't any too happy to begin with. She liked cities, she said, and she wanted them to break their pledge about whisky; but John said no, they would go on as they started. She cried a little, but it blew over.

When their Mexican cook got sick one day, she cried some more, and said she didn't like housework. She ran away from John, and got on the train to San Antonio before he knew it; but he understood. It was natural for her to miss her city friends, and it was likely the influence of that hound Turner was still on her a little.

So John got a friend of his at the fort to get out his airplane and take him to San Antonio, and he met her at the station there when she came in. You never saw anybody so surprised.

"John P.!" she said. "Oh, gosh!"

He took her to the Menger Hotel. In their room, she sat down and said the funniest thing:

"Are you going to beat me up?"

"No," John says. "There'll be no trouble unless there's some man mixed up in this. Is there?"

"No, John P.," she said, "there isn't. Thank God for that, because you're some man, John P., and I'm ashamed of myself. I was coming back anyhow, honest—next train."

And that's the story. Now, is it a romance or isn't it? Did you ever hear anything more like a book? The editor at McAllen says it's more like a book than any book he ever read.

### NOT KNOWING

Not knowing where you are, with everywhere  
Your possible abode, there is no place  
I evermore may shrink from. Maybe there  
His voice will sound, or here perhaps his face

Will come again before me: thus I say  
In any land or clime or street or house,  
In every hour of the night or day,  
Even the grave no terror now allows,

And yet no hope, no choice of where to die.  
Though haunted by the vague half certainty  
Of stumbling on you underneath the sea,  
It may be inland, in the earth, you lie.

One is less broken, held in the arms of fear;  
Less lonely who at least may feel death near.

*Marcia Nardi*



# The Posada

THE STORY OF A NIGHT OF TERROR IN THE HUT OF PEDRO,  
WHO BOASTED A GORY RECORD AS A MURDERER ON  
THE BANANA FARMS OF THE OLANCHO COAST

By John Steuart Erskine

"PEDRO is late," grumbled the squat dark-skinned youth disappointedly. "Soon I must go home, for we start with dawn."

The sun was already hidden behind the rugged pine-clad mountains that towered purple-black against the greening sky. In the soft evening light the clearing around the small mud house seemed colorful and friendly; the grass became finer and more tender; the rugged outcrops of limestone, the stiff clumps of oak and pine, lost their harsh aloofness and melted into the homely content of dusk. The great mountains on every side might still live all for themselves, indifferent to the human germs that vainly scratched their epidermis; but this clearing was part of man's life, an outlying focus of the human mind, joined to the greater ganglia by the tenuous white nerve of the royal highway.

In Central America, and most particularly in the republic of Olancho, a *camino real* is not a broad thoroughfare whereon speeding motors drive three abreast. It is usually a track along which mules may carry their burdens of two hundredweight at a pace of about fifteen miles a day.

Now it wriggles up the face of steep hills of granite and clay, where grass clings but precariously, and the pine trees stand on toppling bumps of earth, awaiting their fate in a night of wind or a day of torrential rain. Then the trail slogs along a muddy hillside, where the mules, each stepping in the track of his predecessor, plunge fetlock deep at every stride. Here it is grooved ten feet deep in the soft white limestone, widened by hand to let the packs go through. There it crosses a roaring torrent of water, blue-white as skimmed milk, by way of a felled pine tree.

Nevertheless, these precarious trails link Olancho into a country, since on them circulate the few products of the land—Panama hats, cigars, pottery, baskets, sugar, bad coffee, and cattle; and by them travel the armies that disturb and control the republic.

The young woman sitting on the threshold of the hut glanced down the white trail and shook her head.

"Pedro always returns late," she replied proudly. "He works hard. On the coast you, too, will learn to work, Ladislao."

She smiled at the lad kindly, showing her white teeth. She was Indian-featured and straight-haired, but a slight protrusion of her jaws, and the chocolate brown of her skin, suggested a touch of negro blood.

"And to drink," suggested Ladislao maliciously. "I shall get a pistol and kill many men, like Pedro. Then all the women will love me, will they not, Tomasa?"

He giggled stupidly, and she frowned.

"A woman likes to marry a man," she said scornfully. "Better a man who drinks than a saint without bowels. Pedro is a good husband to me, and polite when sober."

A scurrying swarm of black and white goats of all ages and sizes dashed around the house and chased one another over the white rocks, only to stop as suddenly as they had started and stare about in wonder at their own folly. An old woman, buff-skinned and white-haired, appeared in the doorway behind Tomasa and peered unseeingly along the trail.

"Pedro is late," she remarked uneasily.

"A little late, *mamáita*," agreed Tomasa soothingly. Her quick black eyes roved around the clearing and espied a figure emerging from among the trees. "There

he comes!" She rose to her feet, a smile lighting her dark face. "I must prepare food now," she said happily. "You will eat before you go, Ladislao?"

Pedro slouched up the trail to the house. He was an unprepossessing person, tall, broad-shouldered, and stooping, with a tawny, unshaven face, loose lidded, blood-shot eyes, and a truculent expression. In his right hand he carried a light faggot hook, and on his shoulder he balanced a long, curving, red-stemmed sugar cane.

"*'Uena tarde, Laslao, maita,*" he greeted briefly.

Tomasa came to the doorway and smiled affectionately upon her husband.

"Pedro," she called, "Ladislao leaves for the coast to-morrow."

She turned back to her work, and the monotonous grind of the *tortilla* stones filled the kitchen.

Pedro hacked off half a yard of cane for Ladislao and a slightly longer piece for himself, and handed the remainder to his mother, who carried it inside the hut. He took his seat beside Ladislao under the eaves, and the two men stripped their cane of its hard husk and munched the tough, juicy core. A white pig and the flock of goats gathered in a circle around them and waited hungrily for the chewed fragments.

"The coast is a good place," said Pedro reflectively. "I worked three years on the banana farms, and earned much money. I had a contract for fruit."

He mused on aloud, recalling the great days of old, the drunken glories, the happy, bloodthirsty murders that he had committed.

"But I return to the coast no more," he concluded. "Last time I killed my overseer, a gringo who would have cheated me; so I came away. The gringos are bad people, and hire gunmen to kill any man who has killed one of themselves."

Pedro saw Ladislao's mouth drop open and his gaze fix itself on something behind him. Turning swiftly, he saw, standing at the corner of the house, a tall, heavy-shouldered, blue-eyed, khaki-clad man, obviously a gringo. A broad felt hat crowned the newcomer's brown hair, and a forty-five automatic pistol was strapped to his right thigh, in plain view of all beholders.

## II

For a moment Pedro stared, too startled to speak a word; but, as the stranger

showed no sign of having overheard his words, at last he controlled himself.

"*'Uena tarde,*" he greeted the newcomer in a voice of surly antagonism.

"*Buenas tardes,*" replied the gringo with a friendly smile. "I seek food and shelter. Can I get it here?"

Pedro's mother appeared in the doorway.

"*Posada?*" she asked, catching the gringo's demand. "How not? There is no other house within two leagues, and already it is night. Tomasa, Tomasa! There is a gentleman who wishes food. Come in, *señor*. Here you may hang your hammock."

The stranger stooped and entered the low doorway of the kitchen. Ladislao stared curiously at Pedro.

"What will you do?" he whispered. "Perhaps he is carrying money."

Pedro glanced nervously over his shoulder, to see that the door was empty.

"He would not travel alone if he had much money," he muttered. "I may let him live."

In the one room of the house the gringo was airing his affairs over a cup of coffee, in answer to a volley of questions from the old woman. His name, he said, was Paul Hogg, and he was walking to the coast to seek employment on the banana farms. He had almost run out of money, so he had not been able to buy a mule, or even to hire a servant.

The mother clucked sympathetically, and probed further. What was his profession? Had he a mother, brothers, a wife?

Tomasa was grinding corn, rubbing the handstone tirelessly up and down the saddle-backed mortar. From time to time she looked up and took in the gringo's features and dress with swift, comprehensive glances. She saw the strength of his long legs, the breadth of his chest, the cleanliness of his eyes; and suddenly she realized that her Pedro, whom, ten minutes ago, she had thought to be all the perfection of manhood, was small, mean, and dirty.

She felt that truly something existed other than this little corner of the world, which was all she had ever known; and her mind wandered, wondering greatly, into the lives of other peoples far from these gaunt mountains where she had been born. To-morrow this gringo would be gone again, and she would be as before, with only her work to look forward to

through a long lifetime—cooking, pottery making, food carrying, and, for diversion, listening to Pedro's boasting tales of sin. Something in her dreamed of leaving all this behind, of putting her hand trustingly in that of this stranger, and of following him along the white trails out of the mountain ranges, out of the old life, wherever he would go.

She patted the maize paste into flat cakes and put them to bake on the earthenware *comal*.

Paul Hogg crouched comfortably on his wooden stool, with his elbows on the table, and sipped the bitter, flavorless black coffee. As his weariness passed, he cheered up and took notice of his surroundings.

The hut was of mud and wattle, with a roof of palm leaf thatch, and was as clean as these dusty dwellings could ever be. His hostesses were of the kindly type that made every night's stop a new pleasure—the mother, old, purblind, hospitable, stupid, and thoroughly dirty; the wife young and pleasant faced, with large, very black eyes that had the broad, soft reflections of the negro.

The men were less pleasing. The young one was of the futile, talkative, degenerate type so common in mixed stocks, and would be effective neither for good nor for evil. The elder was a murderer—of that Hogg had no doubt. He knew the type of old. It combined the fierce energy of the Spaniard, the bloodthirstiness of the Indian, and the uncontrolled impulsiveness of the negro. Sober, it was dangerous; drunk, it was a menace to life. Still, for to-night there was little to fear.

Tomasa set before Hogg half a dozen *tortillas* on a not too immaculate cloth, two soft-boiled eggs oozing white from a hole in the big end, and a small dish of red beans. Then she sallied out to call her husband and Ladislao to the kitchen.

As she approached, she heard the two men muttering together in low voices, and she caught some of the words.

"You are not afraid that he has come to seek you, Pedro?" Ladislao was asking. "He heard what you said about having killed that other gringo. Will you not kill him?"

Pedro grunted indifferently.

"That may be," he said. "I have not decided. We shall see."

Tomasa stood trembling in the doorway, her eyes wide with terror.

"Food is ready, Pedro," she stammered. As he rose and faced her, she whispered swiftly: "You must not kill him," and, turning, she padded back to the kitchen.

At the doorway she hesitated. She saw her mother-in-law talking with Hogg, whose broad, khaki-clad back was turned to her. She dared not enter the room, lest they should see her trouble. Tremblingly she called:

"*Mamáita!*"

Even to her own ears her voice sounded unnatural. The old woman dimly perceived the excitement in her daughter-in-law's features, and, with a muttered "*con permiso*" to Hogg, she hobbled to the door and followed her out, whispering repeatedly:

"What will happen? What will happen?"

Hogg pushed away his plate, now emptied of beans, drew from his pocket a pack of cigarettes, and rose to seek a light from the kitchen fire. As he passed the small window, he saw, outside, Tomasa talking animatedly to the old woman and gesturing repeatedly toward the house. He observed a look of surprise grow on the mother's face.

"A so nice young man!" he heard her exclaim as, patting her daughter-in-law's arm, she hastened back to the kitchen.

Hogg picked up a smoldering stick and touched his cigarette to it. As he returned to his hammock, he wondered what could have disturbed the women.

Pedro and Ladislao took their seats beside the kitchen table, and the old woman spoke to her son in a low voice.

"Pedro of my heart," she pleaded, "you must not kill this nice young man. He is very poor, and he is doing no harm. It would be a grievous sin!"

Pedro scowled at her. He had not the slightest intention of killing the stranger, but he did not wish to give in too readily, lest Ladislao should think him dominated by his womenfolk. "What matters that to you, little mother?" he asked rudely. "He is only a gringo, and the gringos are enemies of the fatherland. Let him die! I could do with those boots."

His mother gave a low wail of terror.

"He is so young," she mourned. "Be merciful to him, Pedro!"

Pedro made a magnanimous gesture.

"Do not fret," he said gently. "Perhaps I may not kill him."

"How thou art good!" exclaimed his mother happily.

Ladislao rose to his feet.

"I must get home," he said. "We start at dawn to-morrow." He shook hands with Pedro and his mother, and came to the door of the living room. "Good-by, Tomasa," he greeted. "Good-by," he added, to Hogg.

As he turned away he surveyed the grin-go wonderingly, as if estimating the value of his possessions.

Tomasa brought her attention back to Hogg.

"You are not afraid to travel alone by these roads?" she asked. "We ourselves always travel by two or three. See there!" She pointed along the trail to two rude wooden crosses which stood in small cairns of loose stones. "Those were two boys who walked to the coast to sell Panama hats," she explained. "Some men killed and robbed them, and we found their bodies there."

Hogg found himself wondering, with a faint sinking in his stomach, whether his host had shared in the murder. At that moment Pedro himself appeared in the doorway and stood looking down upon his guest. Hogg pretended not to have seen him.

"Afraid?" he replied to Tomasa with a cheerful laugh. "Not while I have this friend with me!" He plucked his automatic from its holster. "Ten shots, each enough for one man," he said. "Day and night this friend stays beside me."

### III

Hogg was not frightened. He had spent many nights thus among natives whom he did not know, and never yet had he felt that his precautions were even justified. Always, however, he sought an excuse for displaying his pistol and its fearsome qualities, lest through an appearance of helplessness he should tempt any host of his into the sin of murder.

"This is my pistol," said Pedro with a contemptuous smile that displayed his ragged, tobacco-yellowed teeth. From under his shirt he drew a nickel-plated thirty-eight revolver, showed it for a moment, and returned it to its place.

Hogg felt reassured. If his host had had evil intentions, he would not have shown his weapon. Then he caught sight of Ladislao's thin form trudging homeward along

the white trail, and his eyes followed the boy instinctively.

At the two crosses Ladislao hesitated, glanced at them, and then turned back to look fearfully at the house that he had just left. The association of ideas was so apparent that Hogg shivered, shifted his cigarette to his left hand, and with his right fingered the buttons of his shirt, close above his pistol.

Tomasa picked up a water jar and sallied out to fill it at the well in the limestone cliff above the trail. Darkness was creeping up from the depths of the river valley, dimming color and outline, and at last swallowing all in its inexorable embrace. One by one the stars crept out of the darkening sky. A barn owl floated by and screamed harshly after he had flown out of sight. Crickets shrilled in the grass, and a night heron called loudly from the hidden waterside.

Pedro barred the goats into their narrow pen and pulled together the rails of the hencoop on its eight-foot stilts, where the chickens clucked sleepily, safe from the skunk and the coyote, marauders of the night. Tomasa returned with the water jar balanced upon her head.

Pedro yawned with widely stretching arms.

"Time to lie down," he suggested. "Shall I bar the door, Tomasa?"

She assented shakily. Noticing the uncertainty of her voice, both men turned and looked at her. Hogg saw dread written large on her face, and he stared straight before him at the cracking mud wall, while his eyes watched the yellow face of Pedro in the doorway. The host pulled the door to and propped a stick against it.

"How much do I owe for food?" Hogg asked quietly.

Tomasa glanced at her husband.

"Two *reales*," she replied.

Hogg's hand went to his trousers pocket to search for the silver coin. When it came back successful, a small roll of yellow-backed bills flipped out and fell to the dirt floor. He stooped swiftly and recaptured it, but he saw three pairs of eyes follow his hand to his pocket. When he turned again to Pedro, his blue eyes were angry and dangerous, like those of a cat bayed into a corner; and Pedro was suddenly afraid, realizing that the gringo was bigger, stronger, and better armed than he.

Three pine splinters stacked in the mid-



dle of the floor gave a flickering light that cast the shadow of Hogg's hammock upon the thatched roof, while distorted silhouettes of men and women danced grotesquely upon the yellow mud walls. Hogg took off his boots and unstrapped his pistol, which he shifted to his lap, where it would be within easy reach. He tucked his thin blanket around his legs, clasped his pistol butt with his right hand, covered it with the corner of his blanket, and settled himself down comfortably.

He did not try to sleep. His ears groped for the meaning of every sound—of the creak of the beds of flattened bamboo, of the soft padding of feet. His eyes tried to identify the dancing shadows as they came and went. He could distinguish the heavy feet of Pedro. Now they went to the door of the kitchen, and other feet followed. He caught a swift whisper:

"Do not kill him, Pedro!"

The shuffling feet returned, the beds creaked, and the shadows vanished from the roof and walls. The white pig, which had been admitted for the night, found itself a warm place under the hammock, curled up, and, with contented gruntings and human sighs, went to sleep. Noiselessly the pine splinters flickered low and went out. There was silence under the thatched roof—a tense silence that had nothing to do with peace.

Presently a rat scurried across the kitchen. Its teeth rasped on resonant wood and then were quiet again. Tomasa shifted uneasily and whispered something to Pedro, who did not answer.

Hogg's attention still strained toward his three companions. He must at least wait until he heard their breathing deepen and become automatic in sleep. Perhaps Pedro would not dare to risk his pistol; and yet—Hogg shivered, imagining the thrust of a knife through the thin cloth of his hammock, between his ribs, and into his agonized vitals.

He shook his head, realizing that he was half asleep and dreaming; and, with the movement, the rafter to which one end of the hammock was slung, cracked softly, and he felt a shiver of attention travel around the room. Then there was silence again, save for the sighs of the pig and the fiddling of a cricket in the kitchen roof.

In her corner the old woman lay awake, staring at the roof above her, with black eyes that filled unexpectedly with tears.

She was sure that Pedro was awake, for he was so silent. Usually he snored a little. Would he murder their guest in spite of all her pleadings?

She suppressed a slight moan. She had often heard Pedro boast of his manslaughter on the banana farms, and she had listened with pride, for she had been brought up to regard murder in the abstract as a manly sport; but this was terrible. The gringo was a likable youth, and not at all the hateful, contemptible big-foot whom Central Americans were brought up to regard as their natural enemy.

He had spoken so friendly to them as he waited for his food! He had said that he had a mother and sisters. To think of Pedro's killing him—blood on the hammock, blood on the floor, and the poor lad lying twisted and disfigured in the dust! There could be no blessing on the house where such a deed occurred.

True, the money that he carried would be more than Pedro earned in a year; and, of course, no one would know. They could say that the stranger had started off safely in the morning; but Ladislao—that boy had a loose tongue! Even now, probably, he was telling his cronies about the gringo's passing the night here, and wondering whether he would leave the house alive. Pedro had many enemies, and one of them might hear Ladislao's talk and tell the *comandante*.

If there were any inquiry, Pedro might be arrested. Prison, an iron ball on his leg, the long row of convicts guarded by armed soldiers, chipping into symmetry the limestone walls of the trails! He would do this for all the rest of his life, never to return to the mother who loved him. Tears flowed down the old woman's cheeks at the thought, and she stirred, rising to her left elbow. She must plead again with Pedro; and yet how could she?

The oppressive silence of the room appalled her. Something unusual was happening. She listened, expecting to hear the faint whisper of clothes brushing against wood or earth as Pedro crept upon his prey; but there was no sound.

Then a chill shook her. The breathing that she had thought to be the gringo's was really that of the pig. The gringo was quite still, making no sound. He was not asleep. He had suspected Pedro's intentions, and was waiting!

She imagined him lying on his left side

in the hammock, peering over the edge of the cloth toward Pedro's bed, a sardonic grin on his face, and his pistol clutched in his right hand, waiting to pour death into the unsuspecting Pedro as he approached. Horror! It was not the gringo whom she had seen lying upon the floor, soaked in his own blood—it was Pedro, her son!

Oh, the murderous demon! How was she to warn her poor Pedro of the doom that awaited him, of the trap set before his unsuspecting feet? She gave a whimpering sob of terror, and collapsed quaking upon the bed. She could do nothing!

#### IV

TOMASA felt the rough mud wall harsh against her shoulder blades. She had huddled as far to the edge of the bed as she could go, and there she lay still. Pedro was separated from her only by a foot-wide gap of air, and she could feel the heat of him and smell the pungency of perspiration from his bare, unwashed shoulders. She sensed his tense nerves, strained in the effort of lying quiet until the gringo should fall asleep.

She imagined the quivering of the bamboo bed as he would slide silently out upon his errand of death. She bit her lip to keep back a sob, and reached out a hand to stop him; but she drew it back, realizing that as yet he had made no move.

To-night the gringo would die. Well, all men died; and yet, if he could have lived, if Tomasa could have shared life with him—

She knew that his eyes had not been wholly unconscious of her when she served him his food; and to her he had seemed bigger and cleaner than anything in her little world. Again she thought of the narrow white trail that led out of the mountains, of padding along it behind him, of stopping where he stopped, of lying where he lay. Well, that was an idle dream, for to-night the gringo would die; and yet—

Her mind, strained with fear, stupid with sleep, reviewed the monotonous details of her daily life; but the man whom she saw squatting in the shade of the eaves, the man whom she eagerly awaited in the evening, was not Pedro, but this gringo. He was her husband, and she imagined a new devotion in serving him.

How had he courted her? She remembered Pedro's wooing—her father's mud house at the edge of the bog by the river;

her father, curly-haired, dark-skinned, slovenly, deaf; her Indian mother and herself, busied over the *tamales* of green corn; Pedro squatting at the doorstep, with his yellow and white cur at his feet, talking, talking to her father in a loud voice about the price of hogs on the coast, the size of his cultivations, and the many men he had murdered in his days on the banana farms, though all the while his bloodshot eyes followed the blue-gowned form of the daughter as she moved about the kitchen.

She could still recall the excitement that had run through her when first she realized that it was for her that Pedro came. She was deadly afraid, and yet she wished to call him on. When he came near her, she could scarcely breathe, and she went weak and shivery. At last he asked her father for her, and he consented, and she felt that heaven was hers.

They were married by the priest of San Sebastian, to please the negro love of show that dominated both Pedro and her father, although the expense sadly reduced their capital. Still, they enjoyed it, for the neighbors collected in her father's house, and the white rum flowed freely, and all through the night, by the light of frequently renewed pine torches, two score bare feet shuffled and stamped on the mud floor to the time of a tunking guitar.

Then they had come here. The enthusiasm of pursuit and the novelty of marriage had died away, and Pedro had settled back into working, drinking, boasting, while her life had become the monotonous drudgery of the housewife, unenlivened by pleasure or emotion or romance; yet she had been happy. She would not have renounced an hour of these months with Pedro, her Pedro.

Sometimes she had been afraid of him, but she knew that with him beside her no harm could reach her. She had been a good wife to him, he a good husband to her. What was this gringo to her? A stranger of a hated race. She found that she did not care if he lived or died; but Pedro must run no risks with that pistol. What would be left to her if Pedro were killed? She reached out a fearful hand into the dark.

There came a frightful crash, and Tomasa recoiled to the mud wall and lay there quivering. Then she realized that the noise was caused only by the falling of a pot into an empty kerosene tin.

The bed quivered under her. Then a faint whimper sounded from the kitchen door.

"Dog!" exclaimed Pedro angrily.

Quiet reigned again, but through the silence sounded a faint snick of metal that every one recognized for the cocking of the hammer of a pistol. The sound came from the gringo's hammock.

Pedro shuddered. That automatic was only four feet from his head. How much had the gringo overheard? He himself had said too much, and Ladislao and the women, of course, had talked more. He had no intention of attacking the stranger, for he knew too well the dangerous quality of these big men who talked so loud and seemed so harmless. His suggestions had been made merely for the sake of keeping up his reputation as a murderer, to which alone he owed the fear and respect of the neighborhood.

Pedro's real reason for having fled the coast was quite other than that which he offered to public credence. On the banana farms he had been a small contractor of no particular importance, and his ambitious spirit had made him dream of rising in the world. Now the laborers of the coast of Olancho fall naturally into two groups—the murderers and the murdered; and it is the desire of every vigorous youth to qualify for the first class. Pedro, therefore, had bought himself a revolver, got very drunk, and shot at a friend of his in the camp—a harmless youth of no importance. The shot had missed, and with a yell, Toribio Carcamo, a well known murderer, had tumbled out of the hammock where he had been lying asleep when the stray lead reached him.

Pedro had not stopped to apologize. He had bolted to his room, snatched up his money, and fled to the interior, where the vengeance of Toribio and his brothers might fail to reach him.

Once at home, his fears had calmed, and he had told the story often, each time with more credit to himself. At first he had merely killed Toribio in fair fight; then he had murdered Toribio's whole family, women included; and at last he had ended with the murder of his overseer—an artistic finish to a long imaginary career of crime on the coast. The story had been an immense success, and had spurred several ambitious lads to the pursuit of similar laurels.

But now the reputation in which he had gloried had turned in his hand. A few feet away the gringo lay quiet, his pistol in his hand, waiting until Pedro should fall asleep. He had overheard Pedro's boast of having killed a gringo, and he wished revenge. Pedro had seen it in his face. Moreover, he had surprised the gringo's eyes following Tomasa. The ruffian would commit murder without scruple to get possession of his host's wife.

Pedro half turned toward Tomasa, instinctively desiring to interpose her body between himself and the danger that threatened him. The bed creaked with his movement, and again, seemingly but a few inches from his ear, the pistol snicked. He cowered low, his heart thumping painfully.

No sound followed. The gringo had not moved; yet his breathing was not that of a man asleep. Pedro clutched his own revolver and planned furiously. When the gringo slept, he must kill him to save himself. Otherwise he would die, he would surely die! A blinding flash would sear his brain, an explosion would rock the dark, lonely house, and no one would ever hear Pedro's voice again.

Sweat started from his forehead and trickled down, to smart in the corners of his eyes; yet he dared not move. A creak of the bed, and that waiting pistol would belch out death. There was no escape, and he did not want to die. He crouched low, clutching the splintery edges of the bed with frantic hands, his whole body paralyzed with fear and despair. He could not move, he scarcely dared to live.

## V

THE cocks in the rail coop began to crow again persistently, although the dawn had not yet appeared. The soft-voiced crickets in the grass, the frogs at the water's edge, became still; and in their stead birds awoke music in the woods. The sky began to glow with the first gleam of light, and the stars faded and disappeared. Very slowly the rocks, the trees, the house, detached themselves from the darkness and took form, color, and position in the growing dawn.

In the hut no one moved. On the bed by the door the old woman lay still, her blanket thrown back, only her thin shift protecting her from the chill of the morning. On the wider bed Pedro crouched face downward, his head on his arm, his

revolver under one hand; and beside him, against the wall, lay Tomasa, emitting slumberous murmurs from her open mouth. In the cloth hammock the gringo nestled, feeling through his dreams the hardness of his pistol, which had slipped from his hand and now reposed uncomfortably beneath his hip.

With a regretful sigh the pig arose from its slumbers and began to rub its back energetically along the bottom of the gringo's hammock. Hogg started awake in panic and groped for his pistol, only to find it missing. He stared around him and saw, in the dim light, the itching pig, the bleak mud walls, the still forms of his hosts, deep in sleep.

He found his pistol and restored it to his holster, swung himself to a sitting position, and rubbed the sleep from his face with his hands. He pulled on his boots and began to lace them up, cursing himself for a fool to have been frightened by shadows.

Pedro snorted and awoke. For a moment he stared at the gringo without understanding how a stranger came to be

there; and then, remembering, with a furtive movement he tucked his pistol out of sight under his shirt.

The women sat up, huddled their clothes around them, and looked at each other wide-eyed. Hogg unslung his hammock and knelt to roll up his pack. The old woman unbarred the door, and the pale gray light poured in.

Hogg rose to his feet and swung his pack to his shoulder.

"I have far to go this morning," he said apologetically. "I shall take coffee at the next houses. Do I owe you anything?"

"Nothing," replied Pedro moodily.

Hogg saluted the others with a stiff smile. His face was pale and old, as if the night's rest had fatigued him. "Adios!" he said.

"Adios!" they chorused.

He trudged away up the trail. When he reached the two crosses, he turned and looked back at the house; and the three who watched him from the doorway shivered and praised God that their peril had passed.

## AFTER SCHOOL

EACH year when school was out he'd bring his card—

Well, now, he never was a stoodjus kid,  
But just a reg'lar boy, an' it was hard  
For him to buckle down as well's he did.  
Reports was marked this way: Low was V. P.  
For Very Poor; an' Excellent was E.

Then there's the in-between marks: F. for Fair,  
An' G. was Good; an' then you know the rest  
If you've a kid or two yourself and share  
Report card day—just hopin' for the best;  
Just sort of hankerin' to see an E,  
An' sighing, kind of, over each V. P.

Well, this year when he brung his card to us  
His eyes was shinin' so, an' we both sees  
He's mighty pleased—an' though incredjulus  
"We sorta thought we'd see a row of E's.  
But he just grinned a lot, an' hugged my knee,  
An' says so proud: "Look, folks! Not one V. P.!"

As I met mother's eyes above our son  
It come to me a sudden, funny way  
That when the big term's up, an' all school's done  
If he kin bring his card—Up Home—an' say:  
"Look, folks! Not one V. P.!" I guess that we  
Won't notice much if he ain't got an E.

Charlotte Mish



# Slawson's Secondhand Car

THE YOUNG MAN WAS NOT AWARE THAT IT HAD A CRACKED TRANSMISSION CASE WHEN GOOD BROTHER BINDERMAN LET HIM PURCHASE IT AT WHAT SEEMED TO THE BUYER A BARGAIN PRICE

By Jack Bechdolt

JUST as soon as he heard the bad news from Decker, the garage man, Brother Orrin Binderman, of Oakley, decided to do a kind deed to somebody. He decided to try to do it to young Alec Slawson, the new lawyer in town. He decided to offer his family automobile to Alec at a real bargain.

Decker, the garage man, who owed Brother Binderman money, might be relied upon to be discreet, and nobody else in the world knew that the four-year-old but really good-looking car had a cracked transmission case.

In its present condition Brother Binderman's car might run five hundred miles, or perhaps a thousand miles, but eventually it would cease to run at all. It was time that the car was sold, and young Alec Slawson was the very man to sell it to.

The thing you remembered best about Orrin Binderman was his face, there seemed to be so much of it. It was round, like his short body. Its bare, pink expanse began at a brass collar button exposed by habitual lack of a cravat, and continued in a northerly direction until it passed the north pole. Beyond that point it vanished in a thicket of wispy white hair.

The general effect of all this face surmounting a comfortable round body was to suggest benevolence. Brother Orrin Binderman heightened the effect by cultivating a set smile and a jolly manner. He called every man in the township his brother.

No man in Oakley could foreclose a mortgage so tenderly or sympathetically as Brother Binderman, and no man in Oak-

ley had so many mortgages to foreclose. Besides mortgages he owned half of the grist mill, three-quarters of the general store, odd fractions of the coal yard, the interurban bus line, and the bank, and all of the big, ugly brown house at one end of the town where he lived, a widower, in the care of the prettiest daughter in the whole township.

On the day when Brother Binderman suggested that Alec Slawson ought to own a motor car, the young man was not thinking about much of anything. He was just sitting tilted back in his little hencoop of a law office with its newly painted sign—tilted back and dreaming in the spring sunshine.

Young Slawson was a nice lad, old enough to be graduated from law school, but not old enough to have any clients. He was tall and slender, his hair was usually tousled, and he was rather careless about his clothes. He didn't own anything at all except a meager law library and a couple of thousand dollars left him by his aunt.

"Of course, Brother Slawson," said Brother Binderman beamingly, "I couldn't advise a young man just starting life to plunge into extravagance. Thrift, my boy, thrift—make that your maxim; but what a man needs is to mix his thrift with a little horse sense, or maybe I'd better call it gasoline sense."

Brother Binderman nudged young Slawson and chuckled at his own joke.

"Take your case," he went on. "Maybe you'll need to run up to the capital some morning, to argue before the Supreme Court. Well, what's handier and more sav-

ing than to drive your own car and not spend bus fares or waste time? Then, also, there's the matter of getting out and around. Make friends, lots of friends—that's how a lawyer builds up his business. You'll be called on to speechify, I expect, specially when politics opens up next fall, and what's handier or more cal'lated to impress the public than a lawyer that drives his own car?"

Young Slawson, who had been listening with parted lips, exclaimed suddenly:

"Say, that's a good idea! A fellow with a car, now—people would think he was pretty successful, and they'd trust him more, wouldn't they?"

As a matter of fact, he wasn't thinking of the effect on prospective clients at all. Ever since Brother Binderman had mentioned the word "car," young Slawson, in imagination, was driving his own machine down shaded lanes about Oakley, and seated beside him, smiling as she fixed her merry blue eyes on his, was the prettiest girl in the township—a girl whom he had just recently identified as Primula, the daughter of Brother Binderman. Ever since his first glimpse of Primula Binderman, young Slawson had had her face constantly in mind. The suggestion of an automobile started him off on an imaginative jaunt with the girl of his dreams.

There was a little further talk, and then—

"I tell you," young Slawson said, "let's have a look at this car of yours. Mr. Binderman. If the price is right, maybe I might be interested."

On the way to Brother Binderman's ugly brown house, where the car had been left in the garage, young Slawson hoped fervently that Primula would be at home. Brother Binderman was thinking of something else. He was a good churchgoer and a conscientious Christian, and he could not tell a deliberate lie. He feared that young Slawson might chance to ask him point-blank:

"And how about the transmission, Mr. Binderman? Do you guarantee that it's in first-rate shape?"

Then Brother Binderman would feel it his Christian duty to enlighten the young man about the crack in the gear housing, and undoubtedly that would spoil his chance of selling the car. He was wondering, in case such a question threatened,

just how he could divert the young lawyer's curiosity to some point about the car that could truthfully be described as all right. Brother Binderman prided himself that he had never told a lie.

Primula Binderman was spraying rose bushes for the aphids when her father brought the new young lawyer into the yard and led him toward the garage at the rear. Primula was not quite so shy as the spring flower after which a poetic mother had named her, nor was she unduly bold. She was a pretty girl, with her soft brown hair and splendid, strong young figure—pretty in a natural, healthy way; and she had the calm assurance that is beauty's due.

She noticed the young lawyer as he came in with her father, and looked at him with frank interest. Young Slawson returned her look eagerly.

Brother Binderman, coming out of his abstraction, saw the two young people staring at each other across a wide space of lawn, and chuckled jovially.

"My daughter Primula, Brother Slawson. What, you've never met her? Well, well! Oh, chickabiddy, papa wants you!"

Brother Binderman was very jovial about the presentation. In it he saw a way out of his dilemma. The young lawyer would not be unduly critical or inquisitive about the car with Primula hanging about them.

"It looks like a very good car," young Slawson said, after kicking each of the four tires in turn, trying the horn, and peering absently under the hood. "I suppose it will run all right, Mr. Binderman?"

Brother Binderman looked hastily at his daughter.

"Don't run away, chickabiddy," he remonstrated fondly.

"Daddy, I really ought to get at the roses."

"While we have a caller? Really, my dear!"

His attention diverted to Primula, young Slawson forgot the question. He was absorbed in a more interesting problem—were her eyes blue or bluish gray, and was it possible that was just natural coloring in her fresh downy cheek?

"We've had lots of good times with that car, daddy," Primula remarked sentimentally.

"Yes, yes, that's so, my lamb—yes, indeed! You see, Brother Slawson, all the girls love a motor car. Well, I expect it will be pretty slick to see you driving out in my old bus with your best girl sitting beside you—yes, indeed, brother!"

The young lawyer beamed eagerly at Primula.

"I haven't any best girl," he said; "but do you suppose you'd care to ride with me sometimes, Miss Binderman?"

"I'd adore it! No matter how nice a new car father buys, I'll always love this one best."

"I guess I'll take your car, Mr. Binderman. Will my check be all right?" Slawson said promptly. "I'm satisfied she's in fine condition, and I call her a bargain at five hundred dollars."

Brother Binderman beamed, too.

"Good!" he cried. "That's talking business, brother! She's a bargain, yes, but profit isn't the only thing to think about—no, sir! I like to see my young neighbors get along in the world. Good things were meant to be shared, Brother Slawson!"

Brother Binderman's heart was heavy with anxiety when the young lawyer drove his purchase out of the yard. Suppose that damaged transmission took it into its head to break down on the spot! That might be a little awkward.

Fortunately, it didn't. The car rolled forth smoothly and grandly, and young Slawson disappeared down the road with a final friendly wave to Primula.

"A pleasant young man," said Brother Binderman to his daughter. "A very nice young man, and no doubt he'll make his mark in the community when he's a little older and—er—wiser. Yes, no doubt of it!"

"I'm glad you like him, daddy. I do."

Brother Binderman glanced at his daughter shrewdly. He remembered that Primula had expressed her willingness to go out riding with young Slawson, and he began to look thoughtful.

"Ah! About this talk of going out with him, Primula. I'm sure I have no objection to your good times; only in this case, not knowing Mr. Slawson very well, wouldn't it be better to wait a bit?"

"Why, daddy, he's a perfectly nice man!"

"Yes—yes, indeed, I'm sure of it; but

—ah, well, suppose something happened and my little girl had to walk home?"

"Why, daddy!" Primula exclaimed, really shocked. "He's not that kind of a young man at all!"

Brother Binderman had to explain hastily that he meant no reflection on the moral character of young Slawson—none in the least. What he had been thinking of he could not very well explain. He had been thinking that it would be awkward if his daughter was a passenger when the—the inevitable happened to the old family car.

## II

BROTHER BINDERMAN bought a new car.

It was very handsome and quite expensive. He winced painfully when he signed his name to the check; and, after all the pain its purchase caused him, his perverse daughter took very little interest in the new car, or in any car except the one that Alec Slawson had bought from her father. It was annoying.

Young Slawson continued to drive up and down the country, and Brother Binderman marveled. He took to watching his old machine as a man might watch a bomb whose fuse he has just lighted.

When Slawson had driven his car more than a thousand miles, Brother Binderman had a quiet talk with Decker, the garage man.

"Oh, yeah!" said Decker, when matters were explained. "Of course, she might go as far as five or six thousand. You can't always tell about a fault like that. So long as she don't get any sudden, violent jar, she might give him a lot of mileage. So long as she runs, she's a sweet car, too; but when that cracked transmission does let go—"

Brother Binderman rubbed his large, bald face and scratched his nose irritably. He was almost displeased with Brother Decker. It was very annoying. Here was Decker as good as telling him that he might have gone on using the old car and saved a lot of money. Why should young Slawson be the one to benefit by the unaccountable obstinacy of a car that didn't know when it was ready for the junk pile?

Why, the way it was acting now, that old car was worth a thousand dollars, and he had let Slawson have it for five hundred!

Brother Binderman was not vindictive

in the least. He wished the young lawyer plenty of luck. What irked him was to get the little end of a dicker. He had good reason to think himself a very shrewd man, and it was all of thirty years since anybody had got the best of him in any sort of business deal.

"There he comes!" Brother Binderman remarked to himself, as he sat on his front porch one fine summer evening. "There he comes, driving *my* car! And I let him have it for a measly five hundred dollars, when it's worth a thousand, or even twelve hundred. Done out of seven hundred dollars—that's what I am!"

The car turned in at the entrance of Brother Binderman's drive.

"Coming to call on my daughter again," thought Brother Binderman. "I suppose he'll want her next. Well, he won't get her—not if I have any say. I don't know what it is about that young man—yes, I do, too! It's his ingratitude I don't like. He never even thanked me for practically making him a present of seven hundred dollars. I hate ingratitude!"

Young Slawson came up the porch steps, smiling nervously at Brother Binderman.

"She's not at home," said Brother Binderman coldly.

He was glad of it, too.

"But I didn't come to see Primula to-night. I came to see you, Mr. Binderman."

Young Slawson wiped his earnest face, which was red, although the evening was cool.

"Me?" Brother Binderman was surprised. "Car running all right?" he inquired suddenly.

"All right? Say, it couldn't be sweeter if it was just out of the factory. Talk about a dependable car! And power! Why, say—"

The young man launched into a eulogy of his chariot that made Brother Binderman squirm. Every word was a stigma upon the older man's ability as a trader. He wanted to rasp at the eulogist:

"Yah, you're so smart! Wait and see what happens to you one of these days!"

Instead, he had to conceal his suffering and explain how glad he was to hear that the purchase had proved satisfactory.

Young Slawson prolonged his talk about the car chiefly because he was too nervous to get at the real reason for his call. Brother Binderman, who didn't know this, began

to reach a fine state of indignation. It was as if this unaccountably lucky young man were boasting of his own shrewdness in getting the better of the bargain.

Slawson ceased to speak of the car and began wiping his face nervously. A heavy, uneasy silence fell. The lawyer broke it.

"Mr. Binderman, I—I had something else on my mind to-night. Your daughter Primula and I—we have fallen in love, Mr. Binderman. We're engaged, and we'd like to get married just as quickly as possible."

He could think of no more to say. The big news was out, and he waited anxiously for comment.

Brother Binderman's bald face reddened, and he puffed his lips angrily; but he held back his reply, striving to remember the dignity due his position. He reflected, too, that a hasty answer provokes ill considered actions.

"I'm afraid I don't approve, Brother Slawson," he said finally, in cold tones. "No, I do not approve your plan. As Primula's father I must discourage it."

"Why not, Mr. Binderman? I come of a good family, I have good health, and I'm not lazy; and we love each other. Why not?"

"I don't approve. For one thing, you can't support a wife. You haven't any law practice."

"Ah, but I'm going to fix that! I have a great idea, Mr. Binderman, and I wish you'd listen to it. I've been taking your advice about making friends, and I think I stand pretty well in this community. Now the town election is this fall, and I think I'd stand a good chance if I was to run for town attorney. The job pays a salary big enough for Prim and me to start housekeeping on, and it would also help me to build up a private practice. I could practically guarantee to land it, if you'd give me your public indorsement."

Brother Binderman knew that this was quite true. He was a political power in Oakley township—a kingmaker in his small way; but he made no effort to conceal his disapproval of the young lawyer's project. "Brother Slawson, it's out of the question."

"Why, Mr. Binderman?"

"I've already made up my mind to indorse the candidacy of John Wrenn."

"Have you promised Wrenn?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Then why not indorse your own son—"



in-law and make it possible for me to be your son-in-law?"

"Because, brother, you're not my son-in-law, and I hope you never will be. I don't approve at all, and I don't care to argue it any more. Good night!"

Brother Binderman rose, and the young man rose also. Alec Slawson had grown red, like Mr. Binderman.

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it—" he began.

"I do; and I think it would be just as well if you did not continue to call on my daughter."

"I don't! If your daughter wants me to call on her, that's her business. Another thing, Mr. Binderman—I think I'll be a candidate for town attorney, just the same. I might even win without your indorsement. I don't like to defy you, but I need the job and the salary, and I'm going to marry your daughter!"

"That's ridiculous," said Orrin Binderman angrily. "Good night, young man!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!" said the young lawyer.

When he had gone, Brother Binderman's indignation exploded.

"I never heard the beat! I practically made him a present of a valuable automobile, but is he satisfied? No! Next he asks for my political support, and on top of that he wants to marry my daughter! Well, he won't!"

"I'm furious at father—simply furious," said Primula, when she heard Alec's account of the interview. "I don't see why he doesn't like you, Alec! I do. Oh, my dear, I'll marry you any time, anywhere, just the minute you say!"

"Gosh, Prim, I—I want to! I'd give ten years of my life to take you up on that right now; but"—Alec Slawson ran his hands through his wild hair, and groaned—"your father is right about one thing, Prim, darling—I've got to have an income before I take a wife. The only way I can see to earn a steady salary is to be elected town attorney. If I could—" The young man paused, his red face very stubborn. "No, darn it, not *if*—I mean I will do it! Whether your father indorses me or not, I'll make the voters of this town elect me, so that I can make him my father-in-law!"

### III

BROTHER BINDERMAN stood in front of Decker's garage, staring gloomily at his

new car. It certainly was a handsome car. It shone with new paint and bright nickel; it had beautiful big balloon tires, and bumpers fore and aft, and a trick cigar lighter, and a spotlight for night driving, and a trunk carrier at the back. It was a pretty thing, and honestly his own, but he regarded it with disapproval and almost loathing.

Decker slid out from underneath the car on the little wheeled sled that he used for such operations. He wiped his streaked face and his filthy hands with a wad of soiled waste.

"Leaf in the left rear spring's cracked, brother," he reported. "It 'll have to be replaced. Take all day, I guess, because I've got to send for the part."

"How much will it cost?" Brother Binderman asked gloomily.

Decker named a modest price.

"Shame it had to wait till your guarantee had just run out," he commiserated; "but it's the kind of thing sometimes happens to the best of cars, and a man can't help it. Just luck!"

"Well, go ahead and fix it, Decker! I don't want to be bothered with details."

Brother Binderman walked across the garage yard and kicked a discarded tire pettishly.

"How's your man making out for town attorney?" Decker inquired helpfully. "Think he's going to make it against young Slawson?"

"Course he is, Decker! I guess the people of this community can distinguish between a young cub just out of a law school and a man of years and experience—a man who's held half a dozen of the most responsible offices in the gift of the people."

"Yeah?" Decker pondered, scratching his ear. "Well, there's a lot of people kicking about John Wrenn. Trouble with him, the way they see it, he's held too darned many fat jobs that 're gifts from the people. They say it's time somebody else got a chance; and Slawson's a popular chap. I wouldn't wonder—"

"Brother Decker," said Brother Binderman loftily, "I'd much appreciate it if you'd get that job done for me to-day. I have need of my car. Good morning, brother!"

He took his leave with dignity. Decker scratched his ear.

"No need for him to get miffed," he remarked. "Just because he's got a mort-

gage on half the souls in this township, there's no reason for him to think he can ram a bloated old goat like John Wrenn down the voters' throats. It's a free country still, I guess!"

Brother Binderman walked to his office in the Union Block—a longish walk on this warm fall day. He disliked walking. He disliked his own thoughts, too. He was realizing the truth of what Decker had said about his candidate, John Wrenn. A man who had been successively county assessor, road supervisor, town clerk, local magistrate, mayor, chief of police, school superintendent, and census supervisor might indeed be experienced and versatile, but voters were beginning to think that his long record of office holding was not due so much to any ability of his as to the favor of the inner powers in politics. Once voters got the idea that somebody was dictating their choice, they might vote for anybody, just to show their independence. Brother Binderman wished heartily that he had indorsed somebody beside John Wrenn to run against Alec Slawson.

A motor horn interrupted his thoughts. Young Slawson himself pulled up beside Brother Binderman.

"Give you a lift, Mr. Binderman?" he urged. "Just heard your car's laid up. That's a shame! Do you know this old bus hasn't been out of commission once since I bought it from you? Hop in!"

"I'll walk," said Brother Binderman shortly.

"Oh, better hop in! I'd like you to see how good the old boat runs."

Brother Binderman's nude face grew redder.

"No!" he exploded.

He glared at young Slawson and his old car. It *would* run, even when his new and expensive one was laid up in a garage. He believed it did it just to aggravate him.

Across the rear of the receding car was a canvas banner that said:

SLAWSON FOR TOWN ATTORNEY

"That young man—" said Brother Binderman aloud, and then choked.

John Wrenn was waiting to see Brother Binderman. The veteran officeholder was filled with gloomy news and views.

"If we don't look out, Orrin," he whined anxiously, "that young snipe 'll lick us at the polls! I know this township from A

to Z, and I tell you right now this is anybody's election."

"Nonsense!" snapped Brother Binderman. He paced his office irritably. "No!" he thundered. "The young cub isn't fit for the office. I won't have it! Why, John, it's preposterous to think that the intelligent, enlightened voters of this town would even consider—"

"Save that for public meetings," Wrenn interrupted. "The point is you want me elected and you don't want Slawson elected—isn't that it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I tell you we'll get licked if we don't do something—something big. We've got to plant a bomb under this schoolboy lawyer and blow him higher than a kite!"

"What bomb? John, you've got something under your hat!"

"Yes, I have, Orrin." The old politician gave his backer a sly look. Before he spoke again he made sure that the office door was tightly closed. "If we use this right—if we save it to the last minute and spring it when it's too late for him to get a good comeback—we can sink him, Orrin! I just learned that young Slawson once spent ten days in jail in Winnemac County!"

"No!" cried Brother Binderman, shocked.

"He did, and I can prove it. I'll get photostats of the records."

"What was his crime?"

"Breach of the peace, disorderly conduct, and assault on an officer. I can prove every word of it. Now, is that the kind of man our people will want to elect to office—a jailbird?"

"I'm shocked," said Brother Binderman. "I'm profoundly shocked. After all, he seemed a decent young man. The—ah—the circumstances of the case, John—"

Wrenn accompanied his advice by a meaning look.

"Never mind the circumstances of the case. You don't want to know about that."

Brother Binderman returned the meaning look thoughtfully.

"You think it would be better if I didn't know about the—ah—circumstances?" he inquired softly.

"I think it would."

John Wrenn knew Orrin Binderman well, through years of dealings with him. If Brother Binderman realized that young

Slawson had been sent to jail because he had refused to inform upon a number of college mates involved in a bit of rough but harmless college humor, he might feel constrained by his conscience to advise against using this weapon. Evidently Brother Binderman also saw the point. He merely asked:

"How did you propose to use your information?"

"Save it to the night before election," Wrenn said promptly. "Don't say a word to anybody, but spread the charges in the *Sentinel*. Bring 'em out late enough in the evening so Slawson won't have time to make any defense. Coming out that way on election morning, that jailbird business will sink him. He'll lose half his support, or I don't know this town!"

"You're right, Brother Wrenn—quite right. We are, thank Heaven, a law abiding community, an honest community, a community of self-respecting and enlightened voters. Yes, brother, go ahead with your admirable plan. I trust all the details to you—all of them."

"Right!" The candidate agreed promptly. "I'll guarantee you that you won't be bothered much longer by this schoolboy lawyer!"

#### IV

THE day before election Alec Slawson saw his sweetheart briefly.

"I'm on my way to a meeting at the Oaks School," he told her. "Then there's another at the Grange Hall in Turtle Hollow. Probably I'll be back too late to see you before it's all over. Oh, Prim, Prim, pray for me—for us!"

"I am, dear—I'm praying!"

For a moment they held each other close, two desperate young lovers who had staked all their hopes on the uncertainties of politics in a boss-manipulated town. When they parted, they did so reluctantly, their hands still clinging, as if no power on earth could really tear them asunder.

Young Slawson set his stubborn chin.

"I've got to get elected, for your sake, Prim!" he declared, and hurried out to jump into his secondhand automobile with its flaunting banner:

#### SLAWSON FOR TOWN ATTORNEY

The banner bellied bravely in the wind as he tore down the road. It was the last thing Primula saw before he vanished.

Both candidates addressed the Turtle Hollow meeting. John Wrenn spoke first. He had arrived with Orrin Binderman in Brother Binderman's handsome new car, and as soon as he had spoken he and his sponsor left the hall.

"Just in nice time to get down to the *Sentinel* office in town," observed Wrenn cheerily.

"You've got the—the documents, Brother Wrenn?"

"Here!" said Brother Wrenn, and patted his inner coat pocket. "I guess you can see by the way these folks acted tonight that we've got to do something strong if we want to carry this election, Orrin?"

"We've got to do it," Brother Binderman agreed. "For the good of the community, Brother Wrenn," he added conscientiously.

"It 'll blow him higher than a kite," Wrenn exulted.

As he drove toward the town, down the badly paved south road, Brother Binderman was telling himself angrily that what he was about to do to young Slawson was exactly what that brash young man deserved. The cub had had altogether too much good luck. He had bested Brother Binderman in the dicker for his car, he had taken advantage of his hospitality to turn Primula's foolish little head, and on top of that he demanded the office of attorney! It was time somebody taught him manners!

Alec Slawson was about an hour later than his opponent in leaving the Turtle Hollow meeting. He drove down the bumpy, worn south road through the rainy night, not daring to think too much of the morrow—election day.

Slawson had made a clean, vigorous campaign. In spite of his modest air, he could talk when he was roused, and he had talked with the conviction that he would make the town a first-rate servant. He felt that a lot of people agreed with him, but were they a majority? So much depended on the answer that he avoided thinking about it.

He had driven a matter of six or seven miles when headlights along the road attracted his attention because of their unusual position. A man stood in the glare waving his arms and signaling Slawson to stop.

The young lawyer halted and leaped out

into the rain beside a car that had gone into the ditch. He faced the drenched figures of his rival, John Wrenn, and Orrin Binderman.

"Great Jehoshaphat!" Slawson exclaimed. "How'd you do it?"

"Trying to dodge that chuck hole in the pavement," Brother Binderman said sourly. "Got a little too far off the shoulder and side-slipped."

"If the town had put a proper shoulder on this road—" Wrenn began to orate indignantly.

Then he held his tongue, for he suddenly remembered that Brother Binderman was the man who had successfully opposed repaving the south road.

Slawson turned up his coat collar and examined their plight. Brother Binderman's new car had sunk two wheels hub-deep in a muddy ditch, and its subsequent efforts to crawl out had mired it hopelessly.

"We'll fix that," Slawson announced cheerily. "Give me your tow rope. That old bus of mine has power enough to lift an elephant by the tail!"

John Wrenn and Brother Binderman exchanged a quick, startled glance. Their mishap had seemed to upset their plan for Alec Slawson's political destruction. They had just given up hope when out of the drizzle and the night came the subject of their plotting with a smooth-running car and talk of a tow rope.

Wrenn leaped at the offer.

"Mighty kind of you, Slawson—"

"Pshaw! Guess we're neighbors, even if we are on opposite sides of the ticket—eh, Mr. Binderman?"

Brother Binderman started out of his amazement.

"What? Yes, yes, yes—oh, yes, indeed, brother! Ah, the tow rope—I'll get it, brother!"

"Think she'll make it?" Wrenn asked anxiously, when the tow rope was fast and young Slawson sat ready to let in the clutch of his car.

"This car make it? Say, this is Mr. Binderman's old car! She'll have you on the road and tearing into town in no time!"

Slawson's engine echoed the boast with a roar. His car lurched forward, taking up the slack in the tow rope. Brother Binderman, with the fate of his new car at stake, closed his eyes, afraid to look. If only the old car held out now! He began to pray silently.

"Hey, Orrin!" Wrenn roared. "Come here and give a boost!"

Brother Binderman had to stop praying and start boosting. Once the mired car moved, climbing almost a foot out of its mudhole; but then it slipped violently and plunged scuppers under in mud and water. A copious splashing of both engulfed Brother Binderman.

The towing car lurched manfully, the two boosters boosted, the rain fell impartially. Then something went wrong. Brother Binderman's heart turned to lead as Alec Slawson came running back from his car.

"She's busted!" he exclaimed. "Busted—can you beat that? Something's all shot to pieces. Can't shift the gears."

"Let's have a look," suggested Wrenn. "It's nothing we can't fix in a minute. That car has a heart like a lion. She wouldn't quit on us now, would she, Orrin?"

Brother Binderman did not answer. He sat down on the running board of his own car in the rain, a beaten man.

He was not at all surprised when Wrenn and Slawson returned to report a broken transmission and the utter impossibility of moving Slawson's car a foot nearer town without a tow rope.

"I guess," said Brother Binderman feebly, as he wiped the mud off his red, bald face, "the best thing the three of us can do is just sit in the car and try to dry out a little. I guess that's all we can do."

"But I've got to get to town," Wrenn objected. "I've got an engagement I can't break with the editor of the *Sentinel*. I've got to get there, Orrin!"

"Do you, brother? Then you're welcome to walk it, if you like. It's only seven miles farther. As for me, I guess I know when I'm licked."

He rose wearily and limped toward Slawson's idle car. Alec followed him and sat beside him on the rear seat, offering condolences on his hard luck.

Brother Binderman sighed and laid a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I been opposing you, Slawson. Seemed to me you were a pretty brash young fellow with all those plans of yours; but now I don't know. Maybe I'm just getting old and set in my ways, and it's me that's wrong. Anyhow, it looks like there's no beating you, and if—if you and Prim—



well, no matter how this election goes, you two young folks come talk to me about your plans. I—I'd kind of like to be in on 'em, and help a little, maybe. I feel like I'm getting kind of old."

It was late next night when young Slawson and Primula acted on this invitation, after they had been assured of Alec's victory over Brother Binderman's candidate by a small but sufficient margin of votes.

## The Titan's Chains

THE EPIC OF MY LORD THE ELEPHANT, KING OF THE FOREST,  
AND MONARCH OF ALL CREATURES THAT TREAD THE  
EARTH, SAVE ONE ALONE—HIS CONQUEROR, MAN

By Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Casserly

WITH sharp-hoofed forefeet a dark-hided sambar stag struck the face of the white cliff with which a landslide had scarred a green hollow among the Himalayan foothills. At the blows, clods of chalklike clay fell to the ground, and the big animal, lowering its head, ate them greedily. A small barking deer—a buck with a bright bay coat and small horns curving in toward each other—pushed in to share the shattered fragments, deftly dodging the angry thrusts of the sambar's antlers when the greedy bully tried to drive it away.

Beside the two deer was a group of wild pigs, the black boar gouging the cliff face with his tusks, his family of five or six sows and young ones scrambling for the chunks of white earth that he dug out. Two cow bison with a half grown calf, a graceful cheetah stag, and two dappled hinds were also eating the clay.

It was a strange sight to see the line of varied beasts devouring the extraordinary meal with evident enjoyment; but the cliff was a "salt lick"—a spot where the uncovered soil was strongly impregnated with natron, soda, or some mineral salt that made it palatable to most of the animals inhabiting the Indian jungle.

The hollow was deep and cuplike, a natural amphitheater, entered by a steep-banked passage so narrow that the great mammoth which now heaved his big bulk into sight filled it from side to side and blocked it up. He was an elephant, a huge

bull with rounded white tusks six feet long, curving upward and outward from the upper jaws—a veritable Titan, standing nearly ten feet at the shoulder, his barrel deep and of great girth, his legs thick, though short, and bulging in front with muscle.

At his sudden appearance all the other animals in the hollow swung around instantly in swift apprehension, ready to fight for their lives or to flee, for fear rules the world of the jungle. When they saw the newcomer, however, and realized that he was not dangerous to them, they turned to the cliff and began to eat again, while the elephant lumbered up heavily but noiselessly to join in the feast. Driving his strong tusks into the cliff, he dug out great lumps of clay, which fell to the ground and broke into pieces.

At once the little barking deer tripped impertinently up beside him, and fearlessly snatched coveted morsels of the salty earth almost from the Titan's mouth. Two of the piglings, deserting their family group, boldly followed the deer's example. The big, good-tempered animal permitted their intrusion, and with the gentleness of his race was careful not to harm them as he moved about.

While the elephant was eating, the sambar stag left the hollow, cautiously approaching the exit and sniffing the air with muzzle uplifted. Suddenly sensing a hostile smell, it bolted swiftly through the narrow and dangerous defile with horns laid back on its shoulders.

A yellow-skinned panther, which was hiding on the steep hillside above the passage, resignedly watched the stag's going, knowing that it was too big a prey to tackle. He was waiting to pounce on some smaller beast. The alluring scent of the young pigs floated tantalizingly on the heated air; but the stronger smell of the boar came with it, warning that it would be dangerous to attack them. The panther was not full grown, and knew well how formidable a foe a wild boar could be.

The barking deer was more his measure; and he crawled forward cautiously on his belly until he could look down into the green cup and make sure that the coveted prey was still there. When it passed below him on its way out, he could leap down on it from the almost precipitous slope of the hillside that banked the narrow alley.

With every muscle tense under his black-dotted yellow skin, the panther crouched ready to spring when he saw the little animal turn away replete from the cliff and look toward the opening. Hesitating to move, it sniffed the air suspiciously, and delayed its going; and the young panther quivered with impatience.

The pigs, also satiated, pattered fearlessly through the dangerous defile, calmly confident in the courage and strength of the black boar. Having led them out, he halted and let them pass him, in order to assure himself that all of them were safe outside.

Their example heartened the barking deer, which started to follow them. The panther crept still farther forward, in order to jump down on it as it passed; but quick eye, ear, or nose suddenly detected the lurking murderer, and the buck uttered a loud, sonorous cry of alarm—the doglike bark that gives these deer their name. All the beasts of the jungle know its meaning. Instantly those still feeding at the salt lick swung around from the cliff face, their muzzles uplifted to scent the danger.

The exasperated panther, furious at being detected, rose up, half resolved to spring down into the cup and attack his prey openly; but the sight of the elephant restrained him, for he feared lest the great tusker might resent his intrusion. Indeed, the Titan had already turned about, disquieted by the alarm, and had stopped eating. With his mouth full of white clay, he lifted his trunk into the air, and, stretching it out, pointed it in every direc-

tion until he located the beast of prey. Then, lowering it, he rapped the tip several times on the ground, blowing out a current of air through it in blasts that made a strange metallic shrieking—the elephant's scream of apprehension and alarm.

The sound was too much for the panther's nerves. He crouched and drew back, but with eyes still fixed on the barking deer.

The disturbance seemed to spoil the tusker's appetite, and, grumbling deep down in his throat, he lumbered with lurching stride toward the defile. The little buck saw a way of escape and tripped alongside him, keeping the elephant's great body between itself and the lurking danger.

The passage, however, was only wide enough to let the Titan squeeze through alone; and the panther crept forward again hopefully, calculating on the buck's being forced to fall behind in the narrow alley. Unexpectedly, when the tusker came to where his sides actually brushed both banks of the defile, the impudent little buck dived underneath his stomach, and, thus hidden, walked out safely, while the balked panther raged powerlessly above.

Where the passage widened, the deer came out from under the elephant's body and dashed away exultantly through the undergrowth. The disappointed beast of prey, springing down to pursue it, blundered against the elephant, which, with a shrill trumpet of rage, kicked him violently away and sent him rolling over and over, with a broken rib, and the breath knocked out of him.

Paying no further attention to the panther, the mammoth lurched on slowly through the jungle, breaking off branches and pulling down creepers as he went along, to cram them into his mouth with his trunk, which from time to time he stretched out to catch the scent of the herd from which he had wandered away a couple of days before.

He followed a well defined track made by the constant passing of others of his race. Winding among the tall sal trees, the path avoided the densest undergrowth and the worst of the tangled network of lianas festooned from the higher branches, presenting an obstacle to the passage of even so powerful a monster as he. He loitered on his way, feeding as he went; for he was in no hurry, knowing that those he sought were not far off, and, as the morn-

ing was far advanced, would soon be halting for their noontide rest.

## II

A MILE or two ahead lay a small clearing in the forest, where the undergrowth of thorny bushes was replaced by long grass and tall bracken. It looked like a glade in an English wood, although the outspreading boughs of the great trees that shaded it were matted thick with the glossy green leaves of orchids and dependent trails of beautiful mauve and white blossoms.

Breast-high in the giant ferns was a group of ten or twelve wild elephants, some standing half asleep in the deepest shade, others sweeping up grass with their trunks, to thrust it into their mouths. Most of them were females, some with newly born calves three feet high nuzzling at their breasts, while older ones played together clumsily, or varied a milk diet with an occasional mouthful of grass filched from their elders. One, about a year old, with the white tusks beginning to push out from his upper jaw, was boldly helping himself to the leaves of a heap of broken branches piled in front of a very ancient elephant.

The patriarch, the ancestor of all the group, was nearly a hundred and fifty years old, and had all but reached the span of life allotted by nature to these great animals. He looked his age. His head was lean and fleshless, his eyes and temples sunken. His ears were ragged, with the lower parts much torn and the upper edges well lapped over. His skin was shiny and shriveled, and his legs thin and devoid of muscle.

Near him grazed a full-grown male elephant without tusks—a muckna, as these rare and abnormal animals are called. Big as he was, the muckna was a timid and cowardly beast; for, lacking his natural weapons, he was frequently bullied and ill-treated by others of his sex better armed. Even the females did not hesitate to hustle him out of their way, if he chanced to approach their calves; for they had ivory tusks three inches long growing down from their upper jaws, and could use them to inflict an ugly wound.

Moreover, these ladies were not so peaceable as they looked. Not only were they more dangerous than bull elephants in defense of their young, but they also often quarreled fiercely among themselves,

as was evidenced by the fact that some of them lacked the great part of their tails—bitten off by their sisters in feminine disputes.

Although all seemed peaceful at the moment, the muckna was evidently ill at ease, frequently pausing to listen as he ate, and looking about apprehensively at any noise. The sudden crow of a jungle cock, or the whir of flapping wings made by a pair of gaudy-colored horn-bills flying above the trees, made him start nervously; and yet he was taken unawares when the tall undergrowth near him was parted noiselessly, and a tusker elephant stole out of it and approached him without a sound.

The assailant had almost reached him when a dry stick cracked under the stranger's feet, and the alarmed muckna swung around just in time to avoid being gored by the sharp tusks of the newcomer, which, seeing that it was discovered, made a sudden rush at the unarmed elephant. With a scream of terror he plunged into the dense bushes and crashed madly away.

Letting him go, the stranger turned toward the cow elephants, which had stopped feeding at the muckna's cry, and were now looking inquiringly at the intruding male. Apparently they recognized him, for most of them began to eat again, although one or two of the younger ones still gazed at him.

He was a young bull from another family of the main herd—one who had been driven away by the jealous older animal that led the group. For weeks he had been hovering near this other family, taking advantage of the Titan's frequent wanderings to try to gain the favor of the females, and remorselessly bullying the unarmed or feeble males. He invariably disappeared when the absent leader returned, for he lacked the courage to stand up against him in fair fight for the leadership of the clan.

A few of the giddier young females were not insensible to his advances. These were watching him admiringly as he tried to attract them by boastfully displaying his courage. The muckna having fled, he turned his attention to the one big male elephant left in the party—the old patriarch, which, blissfully unconscious of the intrusion, was feeding peacefully. The interloper moved to the decrepit beast and began to molest him.

The patriarch tried to shamle away from the unprovoked attack, but the bully

followed and prodded him with his tusks. Before one vigorous thrust the wretched ancient stumbled on to his knees, and was promptly kicked and pounded until he fell over on to his side. His assailant drew off, and the poor old beast struggled to rise; but just as he had almost succeeded in getting on to his feet, the vicious brute charged him and hurled him violently to the ground, with a deep wound in his shoulder from his assailant's thrust.

Boasting in this shameful triumph, the coward stood exultingly over his victim; but a sudden crashing through the undergrowth startled him, and with a fierce trumpet of rage the Titan dashed out into the open. The bully drew back irresolutely, and would have bolted; but there was no escape, and with a desperation that lent him a temporary courage he turned to face the angry lord of the group.

At first sight the two opponents looked fairly well matched, for there was little difference in their height or in the length of their tusks; but as the Titan, seeing that his challenge was accepted, halted for a moment and prepared to attack with proper caution, it could easily be seen that he was much the finer animal. He was a true *koomeria*—that is, a natural thoroughbred, with nearly all the points that a first-class elephant should have.

He stood higher on the forelegs than behind, and his straight, flat back sloped down from shoulder to tail. His head and chest were remarkably massive, his neck short and thick, his eyes full, bright, and intelligent. His trunk was thick and heavy, his tail long and well feathered. His whole appearance bespoke courage as well as strength.

The other was a typical *meerga*, or third-rate elephant—weedy, lank, and leggy, with a long, lean neck and an arched back. His head was small, his eyes were vicious and restless; but his long legs and light body promised speed and agility.

The Titan began to circle about his antagonist, seeking an opening to attack with his tusks, while the other swung around to keep his head always toward the challenger. At last, losing patience, the thoroughbred charged at his antagonist, with trunk curled up out of harm's way, ears cocked, and tail uplifted. The two great skulls crashed together, forehead to forehead.

The shock was so great that the younger elephant was borne back violently almost

on his haunches; but his agility saved him, and he contrived to avoid the heavy pressure by swinging his hindquarters around. He drew back, disentangling his tusks from his enemy's, and with a quick rush tried to sink them in the Titan's exposed side.

But the latter, although heavier and less active, was a skilled fighter. He turned quickly, meeting the charge squarely head on; and with their sharp ivory weapons locked again, the two great beasts pushed each other with might and main, straining on slanted legs, their feet pressed hard against the trampled earth, their tremendous weight flung forward. Each strove to force the other back and down.

The grim struggle lasted several minutes, but the Titan's strength told in the end, and slowly, yet surely, he was bearing his adversary back, when again the *meerga* disengaged himself by an adroit movement. He was not quick enough to escape the point of the other's right tusk, which gashed his side from shoulder to haunch. The pain of the wound unnerved him, terror seized him, and in wild fear he bolted across the glade and plunged headlong into the jungle, in cowardly flight. The crashing sounds of his mad passage through the undergrowth soon died away as he fled in panic.

The victor disdained to pursue his defeated foe, but instead went over to where the bully's victim, the old patriarch, still lay helpless on the ground. The Titan was his son, and had supplanted him in the headship of the clan, but so long ago that all sense of rivalry between them had died.

Wild animals, as a rule, show little solicitude for a stricken companion; but, like a dutiful son, the younger knelt down at his father's back, and, pressing the base of his curled trunk under him, tried to lever him up. It was a long task, for the patriarch was too much dazed by the shock of his fall to have strength left to help himself; but at last, trembling and shaken, he managed to stand upright again.

All through this scene, as during the fight, the cow elephants had looked on unconcernedly, and now they placidly resumed eating. The young calves, engrossed in their play or feeding, had been calmly unconscious of it all. The disturbance had delayed the usual noontide siesta of the elephants; and presently, one after another, they disposed themselves to sleep away the hottest hours of the day.



The midday hush had fallen on the forest. The Titan lay down on his side, and from time to time, in his slumber, automatically lifted his uppermost ear and let it fall again heavily with a noise like a pistol shot. While some followed his example and took their rest lying, others dozed standing up. The babies were prostrate under their mothers' bodies.

Presently the curtains of the high undergrowth were cautiously parted, and the muckna poked his head out. Seeing that his enemy had vanished, he stole into the glade; and soon even he fell asleep, but standing, and awaking nervously again and again. Only the old patriarch, rumbling deep down in his throat, and scraping up dust with his toenails to snuff it up in his trunk and blow it on his wound, in order to keep the flies away, remained awake.

### III

THE silence of the jungle was profound. Even the drowsy hum of the insects seemed to die down, and the loquacious monkeys in the tree tops were quiet. Nothing stirred except a few gorgeous butterflies as large as a man's open hand, which had been swept down from the mountains by the morning breeze, and which now hovered lazily over the white bells of the flowers on the high bushes.

In the early afternoon the elephants awoke and wandered about to feed again. Some swept up swaths of grass. Others broke off leafy branches, and, holding them in their trunks, beat their sides and heads with them, to drive off the flies, and then thrust them into their mouths and chewed wood and leaves with relish. Some tore down the hanging creepers, dislodging showers of big red ants, which, falling on their backs, bit fiercely into their soft, thick skin.

The muckna began his meal by stripping a slender tree of its lowest boughs. Then, desiring the higher branches, he curled his trunk, put the base of it a foot from his forehead, against the stem, and pushed until the roots were torn out of the ground and the tree crashed down, bringing the coveted foliage within his reach.

While they fed, the elephants scattered about, but never went very far away from one another. On every side the noise of cracking boughs and torn creepers indicated the near presence of other family groups belonging to the herd, which num-

bered nearly seventy animals. This went on until two hours before midnight, when all the elephants settled down to sleep.

About four o'clock in the morning they woke up. Then, as if by a concerted plan, the various groups drew near together, and, one leading the way, began to move steadily in a certain direction. The herd was changing its feeding ground and making for a favorite haunt, to which it was in the habit of resorting at this season every year. It had definite jungle tracks to follow, though at times these were scarcely discernible, new vegetation having spread over them since they were last used.

In each party the cows, with the youngest calves, headed the line and set the pace for the rest, the bulls bringing up the rear. If the males had led, the babies would probably have dropped behind and the family would have been broken up, as the mothers would not desert their young. Without actually joining, group followed group closely enough to form a column, and the whole herd went forward slowly but steadily, the animals feeding as they proceeded. Most of them kept the line, snatching at creepers, leaves, or grass on their road. Others diverged from the path at times, to make little excursions to one side or the other in search of food, always rejoining their party before long.

About ten o'clock in the morning the whole herd halted, as if by order, and the various groups prepared to settle down for the noontide meal and siesta. The mothers mostly contented themselves with such fodder as they found on the spot where they happened to be, so that their calves could be fed and rest at once. Many of the other elephants wandered off into the jungle to graze, but returned to their families to sleep.

The herd got on the move again in the afternoon, and tramped along in the same leisurely way until about ten o'clock, when it halted for the night's repose. Thus, day after day, the column proceeded to its destination with the same routine, the pace of the smallest and slowest animals determining the rate and the duration of the march. Except when occasional strayers wandered off to right or left of the line of advance, the elders went in single file, each stepping precisely into the footprints of the one preceding it; so that, but for the stragglers and the calves, the trail they left looked as if but one elephant had passed.

Once a broad and swift-flowing river was met with, barring their advance. The thirsty beasts waded joyfully into it, gratefully drank of the cool stream, with the chill of Himalayan snows still on it, and wallowed luxuriously in the shallows. The cows, standing knee-deep, sucked up the water to squirt a shower bath over their protesting babies. Then, when the herd swam across, the anxious mothers supported their youngest offspring with their trunks, while the older calves climbed upon their backs and were thus ferried safely to the opposite bank.

For days the column marched in the green gloom under the forest giants—mostly teak, sal, and simal trees—which, bare of boughs for half their height, spread their upper branches to form a canopy so thick that the tropic sunshine could not filter through it. Occasionally the herd passed from the trees to stretches of tall cane so dense that even these mammoths could only penetrate them by narrow paths made by others of their race when the plants were young, and kept open by their constant traffic. Here even the habitual stragglers were forced to keep in file. Sometimes the big trees gave place to patches of plumed, creaking bamboos or elephant grass twelve feet high, with feathery tops six feet higher, in which the big beasts were utterly lost to sight.

At last the goal was reached—a particularly dense and shady part of the immense forest, abounding in just the vegetation that they liked best, with a convenient river flowing between steep, high banks, which in three or four places sloped down comfortably to the water's edge, so that they could easily reach it to drink and bathe. It was an ideal spot for a fairly lengthy stay. Having reached its destination, the column at once broke up into its component groups, which scattered about the new feeding ground.

Now began a wholly new chain of events. No sooner had the herd arrived than two watchers, half naked brown men, having counted its number, set off at a steady jog trot along forest paths to report the fact to an anxious European miles away in a rough jungle hut—one who had been waiting weary weeks for just this item of news. A word of his brought hundreds of Indians running excitedly from the shelter of grass-thatched temporary dwellings of boughs, reeds, or split bamboos. Many

tame elephants, with their hind legs chained to great trees, lazily beating off the worrying flies with leafy branches held in their trunks, looked up expectantly as their attendants—a mahout, or driver, and a coolie to each one—came hurriedly toward them. These men released the huge animals from their fetters, bound great mattresslike pads stuffed with straw on their backs with girth ropes, and bade them kneel to receive their loads.

In less than an hour the encampment of rudely built huts was left to fall to pieces, and a snaky column of men and tame elephants wound in single file through the forest toward the part of the jungle in which the two watchers had located the herd.

Little recking that any one designed evil to them, the wild elephants had settled down to enjoy their temporary paradise. They did not know that they had a commercial value, or that human beings, having to toil for their own living, thought that animals should also work, and be made to help men in the struggle for existence. The poor beasts had yet to learn that their great strength was not to be wasted—that it could be put to profitable account in bearing heavy burdens, hauling logs of timber, helping men to kill each other by carrying guns, ammunition, and supplies, or in exalting the great ones of the earth by raising viceroys and rajahs high above the common herd in the pageantry of state processions.

For this they were to be deprived of their birthright to freedom; and against them came, if not all the king's horses and all the king's men, at least a number of an emperor's tame elephants and of an emperor's men. For the Imperial Kheddah Establishment, a department of the government of India, which exists to capture these valuable beasts and sell them in the open market, had sent a large party of hunters, coolies, and trained animals to catch some of the many wild elephants that still people the immense forest of the Terai; and this particular herd was the first marked down.

#### IV

IGNORANT of what fate had in store for them, the mammoths passed their days and nights in the usual pleasant routine of eating and sleeping. In the midst of plenty the Titan, confirmed wanderer as he was,

seemed content for a while to remain with his harem, although sooner or later the boredom of placid family life would seize him, as it seizes so many wild tuskers, and would drive him away to weeks of solitary roaming.

While he stayed, he was constantly watched by the defeated meerga, which still remained hopefully near the group, taking care that the lord of it never saw him. He was waiting until the usual fit of restlessness should seize his enemy and give him another opportunity to intrude; but fate had decreed otherwise.

When the elephant hunters had located the herd, they halted a mile from it. Half of the three hundred coolies filed off to the right, in pairs, at intervals of fifty yards, and the other half to the left. They moved on until the leaders of the two parties met beyond the herd, when all halted where they were, and faced inward, inclosing the animals within a circle of men in couples half a hundred paces or more apart.

Then, working outward, each pair quickly built a light railing of split bamboos toward their neighbors on either side, thus marking a definite ring around the herd. They also ran up shelters of leafy branches for themselves on the spot where they had halted. These marked the posts where the couples were to remain on guard against the elephants breaking out of the ring; and here their food was brought them and they were visited regularly to insure their wakefulness.

The animals were thus hemmed in for a week before most of them realized it. Occasionally a straying elephant happened to approach the fence; but the sudden appearance of the guarding coolies and their shouts, if it were daytime, and the still more effective watch fires by night, drove them back again to the herd.

A few which had already had experience of man—wanderers and plunderers of the scanty crops in the patches of cultivation around jungle villages, like the Titan, and murderous "rogues" like the meerga, which had causelessly stalked and killed inoffensive peasants in the forest—were not so easily frightened away. But for them a few shots fired in the air, or, if these failed, a bullet from a big-bore muzzle-loading musket, were equally effective. Most of the animals remained contentedly feeding and resting inside the imprisoning circle, still ignorant of its existence.

At last, one morning, all were forced to realize it; for the ring began to contract slowly, and the men, shouting and striking tree trunks with sticks, closed in on the prisoners everywhere except at one point. The elephants, disliking the noise, drew together and instinctively moved in the only direction that still seemed to be left open.

As they went, the disturbers of their peace came on quicker and quicker, the men's cries grew louder, guns were fired, and the din became deafening. Panic seized the herd, and the animals bolted in a disorderly mob, all fleeing toward the point that appeared to offer a chance of escape. Big and small, bulls, cows, and calves, were mixed up indiscriminately. Babies were knocked down, and their mothers, striving to help them, were swept away by the rush of their terrified companions. The Titan and the meerga raced side by side with no thought of hostility between them.

Suddenly the leading elephants found their path rapidly contracting. As they burst through the hanging network of interlaced creepers and trampled down the dense undergrowth, the way out to either side was blocked by converging walls of stout timber uprights, forming a sort of chute or funnel. Down this they were thrust by the increasing pressure of their followers, frightened more than ever by volleys of gunshots behind them.

The passageway kept narrowing until they were wedged in two or three abreast; but, just as it seemed about to close altogether, it ended, and the leaders and the struggling mob behind them rushed gladly into apparent freedom. The noises ceasing, they slowed down and spread themselves about, while the anxious mothers forced their way through the rest to seek their calves.

Although they did not know it until later, the whole herd, with the exception of a dozen that had managed to break out through the beaters before reaching the fatal bottle neck, were prisoners in a space about fifty yards in diameter, inclosed by a circular palisade of big tree trunks twelve feet high firmly planted in the earth, with a ditch four feet deep and wide dug at its foot. As the last of the frightened elephants rushed through the point of the funnel-shaped approach to the ring, a gate of strong timbers, slung with rope hinges

to a crossbeam above, had been dropped behind them, and all were trapped within the inclosure.

At first, crowding together with a sense of mutual protection in their nearness, the herd did not discover the narrow limits of their prison; but as hours passed, and hunger forced them to separate and move about to feed, they soon came upon the confining wall. Some tried to break through it, but blank cartridges were fired at them, and lighted torches were pushed between the uprights into their faces. Those who persisted in attacking the timbers, although hampered by the trench, were driven back by spear thrusts. At night a ring of fires blazed behind the palisade and daunted the most daring elephants.

Next day the gate was lifted; and the wondering herd, huddling close in community of misery, saw twelve big tusked men astride their necks, enter the inclosure. At first the captives only stared in amazement at their kinsmen. The meerga chanced to be the nearest to the strangers and, ill-temperedly resenting their presence, he moved aggressively toward them. He was promptly met, skull to skull, by a tall trained male. With superior courage and weight, the tame elephant ran him backward with interlocked tusks until, his craven heart failing him, the bully disengaged himself and bolted around and around the prison in terror, blundering blindly into his fellows.

Then, with the light of battle in his eyes, the Titan strode forward majestically to challenge the victor. At once four great tusked men, each nearly as big and powerful as himself, closed in on him, front, sides, and rear, and effectually immobilized him, despite his frantic attempts to break out and fight them all.

Then—crowning ignominy!—before he

knew what was happening, two men, skilled noosers, crept out from under the tame elephants and bound his hind legs together with ropes, so that he could barely hobble. While the same fate was befalling his companions in turn, he was pushed and dragged helplessly out of the inclosure by the combined strength of his four guards and forced close to a huge tree.

Here the ropes were quickly replaced by chains passing around the tree trunk, and he was effectually fastened up. He struggled indignantly and strained furiously at the fetters, but his chains were of steel, and even his giant strength was powerless against them. The Titan was a slave, never more to roam freely through the vast, dim aisles of the great forest in the changing seasons of the year!

Two years have passed. The scene changes. Between the gayly colored houses, with veiled women peeping down through the screened windows, along a street in the chief town of a native state far from the forest of the Terai, between saalaaming crowds of shaven-crowned Hindu spectators, there comes a stately procession. It is headed by a troop of red-uniformed cavalry with steel breastplates and helmets, riding desert-bred stallions with long manes and tails dyed pink. Behind these, with impressive dignity, moves a tall elephant covered with long, trailing housings of embroidered cloth of gold, and bearing on his broad back a silver howdah. In that glittering pavilion sits a gorgeously robed rajah, with ropes of pearls around his throat and a diamond worth a king's ransom in his turban. On either side of the beast walks a scarlet-clad groom, holding the end of a massive chain that passes around the huge animal's neck.

The elephant is the Titan, still fettered; but now his chains are of gold.

### THE CITY

As some awe-stricken, pagan neophyte  
Might stand before his high priest's ornate shrine  
And half in terror, half in strange delight,  
Behold the glory of the great divine.

So I now stand before the city's throne—  
The fearful majesty of span on span,  
And lift my eyes to heights of steel and stone  
Abashed and humbled by the might of man.

*Paul Chadwick*



# Here Comes the Bride!

THIS WISTFUL GIRL APPROACHED THE ALTAR IN A REBELLIOUS MOOD ALTHOUGH SHE GREATLY LOVED THE YOUNG GROOM BESIDE HER

By Charles Divine

AS Evelyn Holloway stood in the drawing-room with her hat on, ready to go to the station, she had a sudden feeling of suffocation. It wasn't because of any stuffiness in the room, where the rich, dark furniture crowded around her as if eager to make an impression, but simply on account of what was ahead of her that day. She was facing another trip to New York with Mrs. Duncan, to buy her wedding dress, and another probable return empty-handed.

In her enthusiasm for her own rôle in the wedding, Mrs. Duncan always forgot Evelyn. She made Evelyn feel that the bride was of no importance at all, compared with the mother of the groom. The girl reflected that if her own mother were living everything would have been different.

Evelyn's mother had taken her own wedding gown, trimmed with seed pearls, out of the attic trunk so often, to contemplate it tenderly, and to tease her husband about the proud day when she walked out of the little country church with him as Mrs. Byron Holloway, that Evelyn's father said that was the reason why the lock finally wore off. After her mother's death Evelyn and her father had had the lock repaired, and had put the trunk gently away under the rafters.

For the last two weeks Evelyn had lived here in Gordon's house—at his mother's insistence, for Mrs. Duncan wanted the girl near her. Moreover, Evelyn's father had surrendered his right of having the marriage ceremony in his own home.

"We'll have so much to do getting ready for the wedding," Mrs. Duncan said.

And now, at the end of these two turbulent weeks, Evelyn acknowledged to herself

that she felt like flying out of the door and never coming back. Even her love for Gordon failed to check these hot, rebellious thoughts. It was terrible to feel as she did, she reflected, but she couldn't help it. She wondered if other girls, about to be married to a nice man like Gordon Duncan, ever let themselves get into such a mood!

She began to pace nervously back and forth, determined to keep these feelings down. The effort gave her a sense of another Evelyn Holloway—another self, stronger and more authoritative than she—sitting on her head, with a soft pillow—one of Mrs. Duncan's buff-colored velvet ones—shutting off her breath and stifling her.

She paused in front of the heavy bookcase that seemed so redolent of Mrs. Duncan's taste. It was filled with books that struck a certain note of culture dear to Gordon's mother—"Italy, the Magic Land," "Paris, the Beautiful," "Memoirs of Mme. de Rémusat," "Stradella," by F. Marion Crawford, "Artus the Libyan," "Wanderings in Florence," and so on. Near by stood a marble bust of Venus on a tall mahogany pedestal—a Venus with wise, serene gaze and lovely poise. Evelyn envied the marble goddess, and wished that she could look at the world with such untroubled eyes.

"Hello, Evelyn! What a wonderful morning to go to the city!"

Mrs. Duncan came into the room with that habitual alertness which seemed so surprising in one so plump. She threw a left-hand gesture at the sun-flecked street outside the window and swung her small straw toque in her right hand. She had bought the toque a few days ago, when

they had gone to the city ostensibly—for the fifth time—to purchase Evelyn's wedding dress.

Mrs. Duncan's small, gray eyes were bright.

"You're a dear, Evelyn, to be ready so promptly!" she said.

Not until they were in the train, well on their way to New York, did Evelyn remark that she wasn't feeling very well. Not until then did Mrs. Duncan admit, gazing at the delicate oval of Evelyn's face, with its pansy-blue eyes:

"You do look a little pale."

She hadn't ventured this comment before, for fear it would encourage Evelyn to remain at home. Mrs. Duncan didn't want to sacrifice her trip to New York for the sake of a slight indisposition on Evelyn's part.

Mrs. Duncan had been called on to make very few sacrifices in her life. In this fashionable suburb, where her house was the largest on the main avenue, she had won the distinction of owning the first tapestry-upholstered limousine in town, of being the first woman to take up golf; and the last winter she had had the triumph of introducing Kolinski, the famous pianist, in Eastdale Heights.

Everett Duncan, her husband, was a tall, quiet man, with a kind of brooding patience in his eyes who indulged her in all her wishes. In these days he had the money to do it. There was a time, however—he was a young man then, and his face less seamed—when he had had to count his pennies, and when he used to commute to his unimportant clerkship in the city carrying a mysterious basket. The men in his office knew that it contained eggs or puppies, which he sold to other workers in the big building during his lunch hour, in order to augment his meager salary.

In those days he often used to stop at Washington Market, on his way to the ferry, and buy a fish to take home for supper. Fellow workers who saw him waiting for the ferry boat noticed the thoughtful expression on his face and the brief case that he hugged under his arm. They thought it contained papers that he was taking home to work over. Instead, it was the fish purchased cheaper at the market than anywhere else.

Mrs. Duncan had been quick to seize upon her husband's prosperity, when it came, and to make an energetic use of it

socially. Everett Duncan was willing. He was grateful for the nice home of which his wife took care, with the help of two servants now, and for the special room, his study, which she set aside on the second floor. It had book shelves and pleasant bay windows, and he could work there in the evening, if he wished, or fall asleep over his paper.

Now that Gordon, her only child, was about to be married, Mrs. Duncan was living in a succession of thrills of anticipation. The wedding was to be a great social event in Eastdale Heights. These trips to New York were trying, she said, but they were necessary.

"Do you think we'll have time to get the material for my dress to-day?" asked Evelyn, beside her in the seat.

"Oh, I should think so. It never takes long to buy stuff by the yard. Getting a dress already made is the real problem, and that's what I'm up against. Evelyn, dear," she continued, once more putting aside the subject of the bride's dress, "just what would you get if you were me?" She made her appeal in a way that was so frankly eager, and at the same time so academic, that Evelyn knew Mrs. Duncan thought she was pleasing her by appearing to seek her counsel as if ready to yield to it. "Do you think gray satin would make me look too old?"

"It's customary for the bride's mother to wear gray, of course." Evelyn sighed faintly. "I think a soft gray satin would be lovely for you."

"How would you trim it, dear?" was Mrs. Duncan's next question.

"Well, I think cream lace would be nice, don't you?"

"How about seed pearls?"

Evelyn turned a shade paler.

"I thought I was to have seed pearls on my dress. You wouldn't want the same kind of trimming, would you?"

The lines about Mrs. Duncan's mouth deepened.

"Oh, if you're set on having seed pearls, Evelyn, I suppose I can't expect you to change; but I do think cream lace would be nice on your dress. Just where did you expect to have seed pearls?"

"I hadn't really thought," replied Evelyn, thinking of her mother's dress melting away with the years in that attic trunk, under moth crystals as bright as snowflakes. That dress had had seed pearls—

and her mother had been a very happy bride in it.

Suddenly Evelyn's head felt hot. Her mind dwelt, for relief, on the picture she could conjure up of Gordon, working in his smock with the ink stains on the cuff. She longed to be there with him, by the open window, so far above the streets that the world was cool and quiet and remotely companionable. She longed to be with her father in the old house in Maple Street, where he would play clock golf in the back yard with her at the close of any fair afternoon. She longed to be anywhere, in fact, where the trucks under the train wouldn't be drumming in her ears:

"I've got you now—I've got you now—I've got you now!"

"It's foolish to plan trimming a dress before you even buy the material," she said.

"Of course it is," agreed Mrs. Duncan promptly; "so let's get rid of mine first. If we find a suitable dress with seed pearl trimming, I'm sure you won't let me come home without it."

## II

THE train plunged into the river tube. Already passengers were making restless movements toward the door.

"I really feel a little faint," said Evelyn, when they got out. "Would you mind coming into the station with me while I have a bite of breakfast? I haven't eaten anything to-day."

Mrs. Duncan looked at her reproachfully.

"Oh, Evelyn, why didn't you eat your breakfast at home? We had plenty of time, and now I'm afraid we're going to be rushed. Of course"—it was said rather tentatively—"you must have something to eat; but don't attempt to get served in the restaurant—it would take too long. There's a lunch counter here some place."

Mrs. Duncan would have been much offended if anybody had dared suggest a lunch counter to her, but she lost no time in piloting Evelyn into a stuffy corridor lined with counters and stools. She drummed on the tiled top with her tightly gloved hand while Evelyn consumed her toast and coffee. When they were on their way again, Mrs. Duncan smiled affectionately at the younger woman.

"Pallor is becoming to you, dear. You look so sweet to-day! Gordon should see

you now. Suppose we go to Best's first? They cater to women of my build—but I wonder if their gowns are elaborate enough!"

They took a taxicab across town, through the streets growing warm with spring, until they reached Fifth Avenue and its bright, quick crowds. Even the vernal lassitude in the air didn't seem to slow the steps of humanity here.

A bevy of saleswomen met them in the "misses' and small women's department," vying with one another to wait upon them.

"A soft satin with seed pearls, if you have it," announced Mrs. Duncan.

"Ivory or cream?" inquired a saleswoman, with a knowing smile at Evelyn.

"It's not for her," said Mrs. Duncan.

"It's for me. I had thought of gray. What do you think of gray?"

Evelyn sat back wearily, and let the sounds slip into her consciousness as if coming from a distance too far to affect her.

The saleswoman was diplomatic.

"It's quite the conventional dress—this is a stunning model—this draped effect is good for a woman of your slight build."

"Oh, do you think I'm slight? I was afraid I was getting plump. Yes, that's lovely, but it's so gray! That one with the lavender tone is more youthful, I think, don't you? I'll try them on. You can't tell at a glance."

As if in a trance, Evelyn moved with the sounds to the fitting room, where the head fitter came, gowns were draped and pinned, and an hour passed, during which Mrs. Duncan paraded up and down in front of the mirror flinging out a long series of questions.

"I like the seed pearls on the gray dress, but somehow I think the lavender suits me better, don't you?"

Evelyn stirred out of her trance to beg pathetically:

"Please take the lavender! It looks lovely on you. I've set my heart on seed pearls for my wedding dress, and—and"—Evelyn suppressed a choke in her voice—"it's about the only thing I've been fussy about!"

The diplomatic saleswoman sent sympathetic glances in Evelyn's direction, and immediately began to speak better of the lavender dress.

"It suits your figure perfectly, madam. That cascade effect of lace at the throat

is very softening." Evelyn looked up, surprised at the saleswoman's discernment in realizing the need for something softening below Mrs. Duncan's sharp chin. "Seed pearls are a little severe for a woman of your age."

"Well, I've about decided on the lavender," admitted Mrs. Duncan. "I'll probably come back for it, but it's against my policy to buy the first thing I look at. I want to run over to Altman's, and we must look in at Stern's and Lord & Taylor's. I wouldn't feel that I had done myself or the occasion justice if I bought the first gown I looked at."

Evelyn had begun to sigh with relief when she saw Mrs. Duncan surrendering to the lavender dress, for at last she could glimpse the possibility of shopping for her own, after all; but now, as she followed Mrs. Duncan out of the shop, with the lavender still left in the saleswoman's hands, she had to struggle hard to keep back the tears.

The same thing happened at Altman's. Afterward Evelyn asked:

"Would you mind if I look at satin here for my dress?"

Mrs. Duncan frowned.

"Oh, Evelyn, please let's finish one thing before we start another! We'll run into Lord & Taylor's. If I don't see what I want there, we can go back to Best's and get that lavender dress."

The smell of cloth goods, the smooth, dry perfumes of silks and satins and imported stuffs, had always played little symphonies of delight on Evelyn's senses, but to-day she found them choking her. She could fairly taste cloth against her tongue, giving her a revulsion of feeling.

"It's nearly one o'clock," said Mrs. Duncan after a vain search in Lord & Taylor's. "I'll phone to Best's that I'll call for the dress later, and we can get our lunch here."

Two hours later, when they were leaving the store, Evelyn's gaze discovered a display of satin on a counter. She paused to inspect it—eight dollars a yard, special for to-day.

"Ivory or cream, miss?"

"It doesn't matter," returned Evelyn with a deep sigh.

"Oh, yes, it does," Mrs. Duncan put in. "Get cream, by all means—we'll be standing together during the reception, and ivory would just kill my dress!"

"Cream, then," said Evelyn.

Mrs. Duncan tapped her foot restlessly while they waited two or three minutes for the parcel.

"I hope they hold that gown for me. You know we didn't pay a deposit."

"They'll keep it, I'm sure. Let's look at the seed pearl trimming here."

"Oh, Evelyn, I wish you wouldn't! It would be dreadful if that dress were sold! Let's run along down there, and then we'll be free to devote the time to your shopping."

The eight yards of satin which Evelyn carried under her arm down Fifth Avenue might have been her shroud, she felt, for all the glow of pleasure it gave her.

The woman who had done the fitting at Best's was busy when they entered, and so they were forced to wait.

"What sort of shoes should I wear with my dress, Evelyn? I don't think my white shoes would be suitable. I believe I ought to get gray suede pumps. We might look at shoes here now."

Another hour was spent in the shoe department, and then, when Mrs. Duncan had concluded negotiations about her lavender dress, she exclaimed, as they finally emerged from the store:

"Why, Evelyn, it's half past four! What else do you have to get, dear?"

"Only the seed pearl trimming."

"Well, don't let's bother about it, dear—you look so tired. We'll send for samples, and you can order by telephone. That's just as satisfactory. Let's hurry home now—I simply won't permit you to do another thing."

The return to Eastdale Heights was made with Evelyn slumped wearily in her seat in the train, too tense and tight-lipped, however, to know the solace of relaxation. She was thinking of the picture of her mother's wedding day in that country town, her mother's gown as it must have swept along the aisle of the church, and the old organ, its pedals creaking but its notes ecstatic, playing "Here Comes the Bride!"

### III

THE ensuing days only added to the tension Evelyn felt, with the growing torture of a hundred details saddled upon her by Mrs. Duncan—Mrs. Duncan's dress, the bridesmaids' gowns, and what little Amy Peters should wear as flower girl.



In sending out the invitations Mrs. Duncan included a number of people who meant nothing to Evelyn. There was Judge Fairfield, for instance.

"It would be very nice to have his name in the papers among the guests," explained Mrs. Duncan. "He's a prominent man. Your father will tell you *that*. Then, of course, the Standish girls—"

"Oh, Mrs. Duncan, you know how we've always fought! They don't expect an invitation."

"Now, Evelyn, we must have the Standish girls—they always wear such good-looking clothes!"

"And you've left out Aunt Kate?"

"I should think so! She's the laughing stock of the town."

"Perhaps," suggested Evelyn, "you just don't understand her."

"And what's more, I don't want to! By the way, Evelyn, I stopped at the jeweler's when I was down town this afternoon and told him you already had heaps of flat silver; so he can tell people to pick out some vases and trays—upright pieces. They look so nice against a wall!"

Evelyn, chagrined, ventured a protest against this method of indirect dictation. Mrs. Duncan silenced her.

"You might just as well suggest to them that we've got all the knives and forks we need," she advised.

"We, we, we!" ran the echo in Evelyn's mind. It wasn't her wedding, she told herself with a feeling of desperation—it was Mrs. Duncan's. She withdrew to her own room, meaning to weep alone; but, instead she sat taut on the edge of a chair and looked out of the window at the new leaves lacing the elms so thickly that she couldn't see the sky.

The dressmaker had been so busy with Mrs. Duncan's demands that Evelyn's wedding dress was still unfinished. Even when the night before the wedding arrived, it lay in the same state, only basted and half put together, while the house was a ferment of preparation.

Again she sat alone in her room, white-faced, her hands clenched in her lap. She had fled here for a momentary escape, but she heard Mrs. Duncan's pursuing voice along the hall. She rose quickly, grabbed up her hat, and slipped down the back stairs. She wanted to talk to her father again, to hear his wise, soothing voice. After that she would be ready to pack up

a bag, she told herself, as she hurried along the street under the dark, whispering trees, and take the first train out of Eastdale Heights! She had heard of girls running away on the eve of their weddings.

The evening air was sweet, as if the lilacs had left a sad remembrance upon the wind. Evelyn felt only bitterness in her thoughts, and a great, overwhelming despair. If she didn't run away now, it would be too late. Mrs. Duncan would have her in her grasp for days and days. She had already planned out the summer under her roof—Evelyn and Gordon were to spend their honeymoon at her cottage at the lake.

Even the thought of Gordon couldn't distract Evelyn's mind from what it now dwelt on.

"I don't love him," she thought. "I can't—and feel this way!"

Her father knew, as soon as she entered the house, that something was wrong, and he quickly divined the cause. It comforted her to have him standing near—a stout, dependable counselor whose wrinkled eyes smiled at her as he patted his daughter's shoulder and explained the world in his deliberate speech.

"Gordon's all right, dear, and he's the one you're going to marry, not Mrs. Duncan—just keep thinking of that. Gordon's all right, and so is his father. I've a great respect for Everett Duncan. He's had years of Mrs. Duncan, and he's lived through it. I never did think the Carnegie Commission gave their medals for heroism to the right fellows!"

Evelyn went back to the Duncans' a quarter of an hour later, and returned to her room in time to meet Gordon. He saw the distraught look on her face, and, taking her by the arm, closed the door softly behind them.

"What's the matter, dear? Wedding too much for you?"

Evelyn looked up at him for a moment in silence. She was conscious of the affection in his eyes, aware that his tall figure lent strength to her, for he was as carelessly confident and cool and solicitous as a big brother at times, and yet wholeheartedly in love with her. He could be amazingly tender at the right moment. Suddenly she clung to him, sobbing on his shoulder. All the pent-up emotions of the past weeks were freed in her.

"Oh, Gordon!" she cried. "I've even felt that I didn't love you any more—and it's not true, it's not true!" she reproached herself, her voice choking.

"I know, dear," he said.

"But to-night I wanted to get away, to run away even from you. It's your mother!"

"I know that, too," he said. "She can't help it." If his mother had had her way with him, he would have been a banker. Architects only dream buildings, she told him, but bankers own them. "I know how you feel, dear."

"And to-morrow, after the wedding, we'll have to come back here, and the same thing will go on again—endlessly! My wedding gown's not even finished yet; and then there'll be three months at your mother's cottage at the lake." Sobs shook her again, as she pressed her head convulsively against him. "I'll go mad here!" She looked up at Gordon a moment later. "Let's chuck it all, and run away and get married quietly somewhere else!" she suggested.

"We can't do that, dear. It would kill my mother."

Evelyn's figure suddenly stiffened.

"Yes," she said bitterly, "I must give her the chance to wear that dress!"

"Now, now!" said Gordon, putting his hand firmly on her dark hair and trying to comfort her with a caress.

"Then couldn't we go away right after the ceremony?"

"Go away! Where?"

"Anywhere," said Evelyn in desperation. "Anywhere so far away that they couldn't reach us, even by telephone. Somewhere like—like Europe!"

She caught at the idea hopefully.

"Europe!" repeated Gordon, surprised.

"Yes—England, France, Italy. You know you count on going abroad with me some time before we die." She gave him a wan smile. "I'm dying now!"

He answered her with a hug.

"I'll admit, dear, that there are buildings in France that I've got to see some time, if I'm going to be a self-respecting architect; but mother expects us to go to the lake this summer."

"Do you call that a honeymoon?"

She stepped back and gazed at him angrily.

"It will only be for three months," he said. "You can stick it out that long.

Then I'll promise to take you to Europe afterward."

"You mean you'll take the pieces—what's left of me after three months of solitary confinement with your mother!"

"Oh, come on!" He patted her shoulder consolingly. "Just to prove to you that the trip to Europe is intended in good faith, I'll get our passports now. I'll call up my friend Charley Waite, of the Blue Star Line, and find out what has to be done. Charley knows everything."

"Not quite," amended Evelyn. "He doesn't know your mother."

"Come on—buck up!" Gordon turned away. "You can grin and bear it."

"Don't be too sure!" she flung at his back as he started for the door. "I may never appear at your old church to-morrow!"

For several seconds she glared at the spot in the doorway where he had stood.

#### IV

THE bridesmaids took possession of the Duncans' house—subject to Mrs. Duncan's suzerainty—early the next morning. As the hour for the wedding approached, the confusion grew to such proportions as could only have flourished in Mrs. Duncan's proximity.

"Evelyn!" came Mrs. Duncan's voice at one moment, while maids were running here and there. "Will you come and see if this sash is hanging right?"

A little later Mrs. Duncan rushed into the room where Evelyn stood in her wedding gown with the seed pearl trimmings, still only partially basted together, and exclaimed:

"I always said you had the only decent mirror in the house! I have to walk clear across the room to see myself full-length in mine. About my flowers—I wonder, ought I to have purple and nothing else? It looks so old and somber and dead. What about some white violets?" Suddenly she stared at Evelyn accusingly. "Do you mean to say your dress isn't finished yet? Oh, Evelyn, and you had all the time in the world!"

"But I couldn't get Mrs. Edwards," replied Evelyn, reminded miserably of the dressmaker. "You had her with you all the time."

"Oh, that's too bad! Never mind," Mrs. Duncan assured her, "it 'll never show. Your veil will cover it."

Only by gritting her teeth and telling herself that in another day she and Gordon would be on a ship sailing away, away, could the bride keep control of herself. Mrs. Duncan's nervous possession of all around her—maids, dressmakers, pins, people, wedding presents—dominated the whole house.

"That present of Aunt Kate's!" she exclaimed, enraged. "That terrible patchwork quilt she made herself! We can't show that with the other presents, Evelyn. It would look pretty, wouldn't it, alongside of cut glass and silver! Patches of old gingham that have been lying around her house for two generations!"

Winifred Andrews, one of the bridesmaids, had forgotten her girdle, and Mrs. Edwards, the dressmaker, was trying to concoct a suitable substitute out of chiffon and tulle. Little Amy Peters, the flower girl, who had been dressed since ten o'clock and deposited on the window seat in Mrs. Duncan's room, with strict instructions not to move till they told her to, had fallen over asleep in a mass of disheveled ruffles. The ushers were hurrying back and forth between the house and the railroad station, announcing the arrival of people who dared to enter the category of "unexpected guests."

Mrs. Duncan's husband and Evelyn's father had retired to the former's study, to smoke cigars and keep each other calm. The door stood ajar just enough to apprise them of the moment when Mrs. Duncan wanted them for purposes of public appearance.

"Heavens!" sounded Mrs. Duncan's voice. "It's a quarter to twelve, Evelyn, and you'll never be finished in time! But it's good luck for a bride to be a few minutes late."

The next moment she came down the hall.

"Everett, I'm leaving!" she called to her husband.

She descended the stairs, went out to the limousine, and instructed the driver to arrive at the church at twelve o'clock, not a minute sooner or later.

The hidden stringed orchestra was playing "The Spring Song" when Mrs. Duncan moved up the aisle of the church on the arm of the tallest usher. She was sure that Evelyn's arrival could cause no greater flurry than her own.

Evelyn appeared in due time. Her feelings were rather dulled as she made her entrance. She was aware of a mingling of voices at the door, the scampering of feet, faces turned toward her, and then the organ flooding all space with the familiar strains of "Lohengrin." Amy Peters, in rescued ruffles, was scattering rose petals in front of the bride as she started up the aisle.

Mrs. Duncan was one of the few people who did not turn her head to look back. She noticed how lovely and fresh and radiant were the gowns of the bridesmaids—mauve chiffon, with bouffant pink sashes and arm bouquets of Killarney roses, wide open. The air was filled with exotic perfumes and the vibrating opulence of the music.

Then she heard an intake of breath from the crowd behind her, announcing Evelyn's approach. A wave of emotion swept forward from the back of the church, rippling over the pews. Mrs. Duncan felt it literally striking against the back of her neck, warm and suffusive.

Evelyn, for her part, moved through it all thinking how different this was from her own mother's wedding. The thought brought a numbing sensation to her.

Mrs. Duncan was the one who remembered the details best after it was all over, and when people flocked back to the house for the reception.

"Where are Gordon and Evelyn?" she demanded, in the midst of the excitement. "They should have been here five minutes ago!"

But five more minutes passed without them—then ten, fifteen.

"I'll bet they've run away," suggested some one.

"Oh, no, they wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Duncan, who was nevertheless bewildered at their tardiness.

Panic began to seize her when the rumor that Gordon and Evelyn had really run away swept through the house from group to group. Somebody had seen a vanishing taxicab. Somebody else laughed aloud at the idea.

Mrs. Duncan bit her lip and turned away. All around her the reception would have been in full sway—if only Gordon and Evelyn were here!

"Where's Mr. Duncan?" she demanded sharply.

Without waiting for an answer, the perturbed lady hurried upstairs, to discover her husband in his room studying a piece of paper that he held in his hand. He gave it to her at once.

"It's from them," he said simply. "They're not coming back."

"Not coming back!"

She stared at him, horrified.

"Not for three months, anyhow," he said.

The room swayed dizzily around her, and she put out one hand to steady herself against the back of Everett's heavy armchair. Then she read the note in Gordon's handwriting.

"Oh, how could they do it?" she cried despairingly. "And not coming to the lake at all! After I had just had the east room all done over!" She began to weep into her handkerchief. "This is terrible! They've ruined my reception, they've ruined my summer, they—they've ruined everything!"

After a moment her husband assured her

that it wasn't quite so bad as she made out.

"You're only a man!" she retorted. "How could you expect to understand?"

Stifling her feelings, she descended the stairs again into the swirl of faces.

"Gordon and Evelyn have played a trick on us," she said with forced gayety; "but I suppose that's the prerogative of newly-weds!"

In the taxicab that was taking them, bag and baggage, toward the waterfront, Gordon kissed Evelyn's happy face again and said:

"I told you that Charley Waite knows everything—even how to get an emergency passport for a friend. I had him book our passage for Cherbourg that first time I phoned him, but I wanted to keep it for a surprise for you."

"Aren't men funny?"

"In three hours we'll be passing the Statue of Liberty."

Evelyn sighed joyously.

"And it's rightly named!"

### MY FRIENDLY HILLS

THOUGH their sides are deeply furrowed by the beating waves of time,  
Though their crags are rough and rugged, yet their message is sublime.  
When my heart is aching, weary, hoping foolish strifes may end;  
When all men have spurned and hurt me, oh, the hills are still my friend!

How they rest me and relieve me from the burdens of the world!  
Oft they've blessed me and caressed me when my soul in doubt was hurled;  
They have led me with their voices from the depths of midnight gloom—  
Manna fed me while hope sped me through God's vesper-curtained room!

In their silence sounds the tolling of a dirge for every care,  
And there's healing in the fragrance of their balsam laden air;  
There are faith and inspiration in their massive, honest forms;  
Peace comes stealing through their shadows from life's lashing, brutal storms.

How they lure me to their bosom when my body's tired and worn—  
Joy insure me while they cure me of the wounds by malice torn!  
Then invite me, with a whisper, to forget each burning grief,  
Never fright me as they light me to the summits of belief.

God has built them, and He clothed them with the laurel and the pine;  
How he bids them chant the glory of a love that is divine.  
From their spires that kiss the heavens flows a balm for all my ills;  
When men scorn and hurt and hate me, then I seek my friendly hills!

*Earl Wayland Bowman*



# Isabel's Education

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE TWO INIMITABLE FOUNDERS  
OF RED BLUFF, THAT WELL-KNOWN DESERT METROPO-  
LIS, BICKER MAGNIFICENTLY OVER THE TUTORING  
OF AN INFANT AND ORPHANED BUZZARD

By Earl Wayland Bowman

This is the yarn of a buzzard,  
When buzzards often flew high;  
Things were then wet—if they were yet,  
Buzzards would never be dry!

*Songs of the Fussy Four*

NIGHT was coming on. A little wind had sprung up, and through the deepening twilight it fanned lazily across the stark and barren sand dunes of the almost limitless desert which fills, with exquisite desolation, virtually the whole southwestern penultimate of the splendid State of Nevada.

Dead Angel Mountain, far to the north, was dissolving into a mere shadowy mound of grave-like loneliness. To the west and southwest, Tombstone Range, behind which the flaming sun had dropped, was like a black and threatening bank of storm clouds low lying on the horizon.

At Arsenic Springs, a day's journey as the burro walks, north by northeast from the two-hundred-and-seven-population, one Chinese laundry, seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff, Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith were camped. These venerable prospectors and partners—the latter condition for nearly forty years—had discovered and still owned the borax mine which made Red Bluff inevitable and themselves inordinately rich. Along with them on this present journey was Versus, their faithful, mouse-colored burro.

The evening meal had been prepared, and Solemn and Dirty Shirt, each with a tin plate on his lap, squatted near a lone Joshua tree. Versus stood a little to one side and watched curiously, and in silence, as the two old men partook of their simple but wholesome food.

"If you don't wring that cussed bird's

neck," Solemn exploded suddenly, glancing at Dirty Shirt, and viciously slapping with his open hand at a young, gawky, ungainly and partly feathered buzzard which had stretched its skinny neck over Solemn's plate, "I'll kick his damned head off!"

"Watch out whose buzzard you're slapping!" Dirty Shirt snapped as the odd looking creature backed out of Solemn's reach. "Isabel ain't here for the purpose of having her head kicked off by an old yaller-whiskered centipede squasher just because he ain't humane enough to appreciate the possibilities of buzzards—or, as far as that's concerned, anything else. Isabel is going to get her chance to be educated."

"Well, educate Isabel, as you call him," Solemn said with a sneer, "to keep her dog-gone nose out of other people's plates when they're trying to eat. I'd just as soon have a Gila monster messing over my victuals as to have a confounded buzzard grabbing at my flapjacks and beans while I'm eating. Personally, I don't see what anybody wants to adopt a blasted buzzard for, anyhow; especially an old, red-whiskered imbecile who has tramped around over this sun-cussed desert long enough and seen buzzards enough so that he ought to know how disagreeable and disgusting buzzards are on general principles. Instead of adopting them, anybody with intelligence would want to kill them."

"It's bad luck to kill buzzards!" Dirty Shirt declared, preparing to toss a fragment of flapjack into the open mouth of Isabel.

"It 'll be bad luck for one buzzard if she don't watch out!" Solemn growled angrily.

There was a spasmodic gulp as the piece of flapjack that Dirty Shirt had pitched into the buzzard's mouth disappeared. The bill was again opened expectantly.

Dirty Shirt chuckled gleefully and remarked:

"Just see how the little thing is getting educated to catch flapjacks on the fly already. I bet when I get her trained and educated complete, she'll be the most popular buzzard that ever visited Red Bluff."

"My Gawd, you ain't aiming to take that idiotic thing plumb to Red Bluff, be you?" Solemn demanded.

"Well, of all things," Dirty Shirt replied, "ain't I got a right to take my own private buzzard where I danged want to take her? I absolutely as hell have," he went on, answering his own question, "and when we arrive in Red Bluff to-morrow P.M., Isabel's destination is to arrive with us."

Solemn glared for a long minute.

"If you insist on lugging that disgusting buzzard around with us everywhere we go," he announced, "I'll be dog-goned if I don't adopt the first danged Gila monster I come across and lug him around, and if that contemptible Isabel, as you call him, ever sticks her nose in my plate again while I'm eating, I'll make my Gila monster bite her and kill her!"

"Yes," Dirty Shirt fired back, "and while your Gila monster is biting my buzzard, my buzzard will probably be doing quite a bit of biting on her own hook. Have you ever thought of that? I'll bet when I get Isabel educated, and she's full size, she can lick any damned, snake-smelling Gila monster that ever—ever—swelled up like a poisoned pup."

"That remains to be concluded!" Solemn growled. "But I'll bet that if that buzzard ever sticks her nose in my beans and flapjacks again, and I've got a Gila monster—if I get me one—that she'll regret sticking it in to the end of her dying days. Isabel, if that's what his name is going to be, wouldn't have a ghost of a chance in a biting competition with my Gila monster when I get me a Gila monster—if I do get me one!"

"Get you a damned Gila monster and try the experiment!" Dirty Shirt challenged jeeringly. Instead of answering, his partner lapsed into a gloomy silence.

When Solemn Johnson had first protest-

ed because Isabel, Dirty Shirt Smith's lately acquired pet buzzard, showed an anxiety to share Solemn's supper, his natural antipathy to buzzards in general had caused him to think, in a comparative way, of the Gila monster, that most repulsive and hideous creature of the desert.

But Solemn spoke carelessly, merely for the sake of emphasis, when he mentioned that he would be as willing to have social relations with a Gila monster, venomous, deadly, horrible as he knew Gila monsters to be, as to divide his flapjacks and beans with Isabel. The last thing Solemn Johnson wished was to even see a Gila monster, much less obligate himself to own one as a pet.

And Dirty Shirt's boast that Isabel, when he had educated her and she had attained full maturity, would be able to lick Solemn's Gila monster, if Solemn had a Gila monster—and his challenge to Solemn to get one and try the experiment—was uttered with what seemed to Solemn such impudent assurance that Solemn felt the only thing left for him, if he would preserve his dignity, was actually to get a Gila monster. Eventually he would make it bite Isabel and kill her, and thus prove that, in a battle between a buzzard and Gila monster, the buzzard, regardless of how well he or she was educated, would be ignominiously and fatally defeated.

Solemn silently decided right then and there that he would get a Gila monster and prove his argument. It would not only humiliate Dirty Shirt Smith—which Solemn considered occasionally necessary—but would, as well, be an excellent way to get rid of Isabel. The latter action Solemn had wished, or pretended to wish, to take ever since two days before when Dirty Shirt had so unexpectedly discovered Isabel on the summit of Skeleton Butte, a miserable, rock-crested mound rising up in sheer solitude out of the ocean of sand dunes near Arsenic Springs.

Solemn, Dirty Shirt, and Versus had strolled casually to the top of the butte to examine a ledge which the old prospectors thought perhaps might contain mica. There, on the ledge they had come to inspect, Dirty Shirt found the pile of sticks which was a buzzard's nest; near by were the bodies of the parent birds, evidently victims of poison baits that some Mexican bounty hunter had put out for coyotes or wolves. Within the nest was the body of

a young buzzard, and another—which was Isabel—nearly starved.

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed. "If there ain't a young buzzard! I'm going to adopt it and train and educate it. I've always wanted to own a buzzard, and I'll bet Isabel—that's what I'm going to name her—develops into the best educated buzzard in the State of Nevada."

Over Solemn's protest—a protest due largely to the fact that Dirty Shirt had beaten Solemn to it in mentioning the proposition—Dirty Shirt had adopted the queer, nearly famished foundling and carried it back to camp. With surprising elasticity Isabel had reacted physically and mentally to food and human association and now appeared wholly at ease.

## II

IN the little pause that followed Dirty Shirt's challenge to Solemn to get himself a Gila monster, if he thought that reptile was a better fighter than a buzzard, and let his Gila monster and Isabel fight it out, Solemn and Dirty Shirt had finished their supper and tossed aside their plates. Then each, from the force of habit, began twisting off a chew of tobacco for himself.

Versus, Solemn and Dirty Shirt's faithful burro, drew near to Solemn when he took out his plug of tobacco, and as he tore off a corner of the plug, stood watchfully, hopefully. Isabel squatted by Dirty Shirt's side, also watching, her abnormally large mouth opened hungrily.

As Solemn Johnson put a fragment of tobacco between Versus's lips an unholy scheme shaped itself in his mind. While he knew that Versus thrived and grew robust and healthy on tobacco, he had a feeling that one or two chunks of the weed would have an exactly opposite effect on Isabel, Dirty Shirt's buzzard.

If such was the case, and Solemn could induce Dirty Shirt to feed the obnoxious creature a few doses of the strong plug tobacco which Solemn knew Dirty Shirt chewed, Solemn was convinced that the problem of getting rid of Isabel would be solved. Solemn smiled as he thought of the cleverness of the idea; how, if it worked, he would turn the tables on Dirty Shirt by making him act, unwittingly, as the executioner of his own ungainly and repulsive pet.

"You dassn't give that danged buzzard a chew of tobacco," Solemn said suddenly.

"You think I dassn't?" Dirty Shirt flung back.

"You dassn't!"

Dirty Shirt slowly twisted off a piece of the tobacco.

"You think I dassn't?" he repeated tormentingly.

"If you dast, do it," Solemn snapped, "and make her shut her damned mouth!"

Dirty Shirt coolly tossed a morsel of tobacco toward Isabel's gaping bill. Deftly the young buzzard caught it; her mouth closed with a click; she started to gulp—stopped—and squeezed her mouth tightly shut while she turned her head toward Dirty Shirt. An oddly ecstatic expression came into her bulging eyes as she looked adoringly, gratefully, up into his face. A moment later Isabel swallowed; the tobacco was gone; her mouth again opened, eagerly, expectantly.

Dirty Shirt grinned maliciously.

"A certain old, yaller-whiskered Gila monster admirer got fooled, didn't he?" he chortled. "You thought Isabel wouldn't eat tobacco, didn't you? And if she did eat it, it would kill her? Which shows that anybody's got to understand buzzards to know what they'll eat and what they won't eat, and what will kill them and what won't kill them. Tobacco is one of the things that Isabel is fondest of and is healthiest for her to eat."

"Wait till it has a chance to take effect on her," Solemn suggested, "and then see what happens!"

Dirty Shirt laughed triumphantly.

"Isabel is already used to it," he replied. "Tobacco was the first thing I experimented on her with, and she appreciates it better than even flapjacks or beans, or for that matter, hunks of bacon. Because I feed her tobacco is why Isabel is so favorable to me. Even when she gets to be a full size buzzard, and can fly where she danged pleases, the chances are if I just give her tobacco enough she'll follow me around like a dog. Tobacco," he went on sagely, "is the best buzzard educator and civilizer there is. Here, Isabel, want another bite?"

He again tossed a fragment of his plug into the waiting chasm which Isabel used for a mouth.

Once more the bird caught the tobacco, and again she acknowledged its receipt by turning her bulging, protruding eyes worshipfully, gratefully toward Dirty Shirt.

Solemn realized that he was temporarily defeated; yet he was unwilling to surrender.

"Well, feed Isabel, as you call him, tobacco, and teach her to follow till she sweats tobacco juice, as far as I'm concerned," he said, and sneered. "But she'd better make hay while the sun shines eating it and following you around, because when I get me my Gila monster, if I do get me one—and I'll sure as hell get me one—and teach him to bite her, and he bites her just once—"

"Just get your Gila monster," Dirty Shirt broke in, "and just let him try biting Isabel once! If I don't miss my guess he'll be the worst discouraged Gila monster, before my buzzard gets through reciprocating bite for bite with him, that any old, yaller-whiskered, sun-blistered, sand-squasher ever adopted here or hereafter!"

"My Gila monster will as definitely as hell be got!" Solemn barked belligerently. "And your melancholy, damned buzzard will have her chance to reciprocate!"

His gray eyes flashing, Solemn Johnson arose, snorted, spread out his blankets near the lone Joshua tree and lay down.

With Isabel clumsily hopping and flopping at his side, Dirty Shirt Smith followed Solemn's example. Spreading his own blankets on the other side of the tree, he also became recumbent.

A little later the soft, mistlike grayness which had been twilight deepened suddenly into thick impenetrable darkness. Over the now invisible bulk of Dead Angel Mountain there was a faint flush from the rising moon; above the low-lying peaks of Tombstone Range, like a small pure flame, Venus appeared and blazed in virgin splendor in the western sky; from the slope of Skeleton Butte came the sharp, startling yelp of a coyote. Once, twice, three times the eerie sound was repeated, and silence fell.

Night had come.

Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith, plus Versus, their faithful, mouse-colored burro, and Isabel, the infant buzzard, Dirty Shirt's queer and unusual *protégée*, slept. Who can say what strange, illusive fantasy of dreams, if any, filled the subconscious thoughts of each?

### III

It had been a hot day. The sun, although about to set, was still blazing fiercely far down on the western horizon, when

Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith, and Versus, their patient burro, with Isabel, Dirty Shirt's lately acquired buzzard, riding contentedly on Versus's dingy gray hips just back of the pack outfit, crossed the gulch at the borax mine. In the blistering heat they trudged up out of Rattlesnake Cañon, passed Slaughter House Hill, and emerged into the end of the wide, single-sided business street of the two-hundred-and-seven-population, one Chinese laundry, seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff.

Near the corner of Mother Skillern's two-story frame hotel, Versus, as was her habit, quickened her step and cut hurriedly across the open space back of the row of business houses, toward Solemn and Dirty Shirt's small but cozy shack nestling at the foot of the sand ridge in the rear of Saloon Number Four.

In a few moments, Versus, freed of her pack, was shuffling hastily, as was her custom, toward Saloon Number Seven, to stick her head in at the door and whinny to Ed, the bartender, to give her a bucket of beer.

From Wong Gee's Café emanated the benevolent and enticing fragrance of frying ham and eggs.

"Tie that damned buzzard up and we'll go over to Wong Gee's and get some supper," Solemn muttered, glancing scornfully at Isabel, whom Dirty Shirt had deposited by the side of the door.

"Isabel ain't to be tied up!" Dirty Shirt flung back.

"Then shut her in the shack!" Solemn snorted.

"Nor she ain't to be shut in any shack!" Dirty Shirt retorted airily, gently taking the young buzzard in his arms. "Isabel is going to supper with us, after which she is going to enjoy the recreations of Red Bluff the same as we are going to enjoy them, and the same as anybody else entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of entertainment has got a right to enjoy them. I'll bet Colonel Spilkins will be surprised to see her!" he finished with a laugh, anticipating the pleasure of Red Bluff and its most prominent citizen when Isabel was introduced to the population.

"Do you mean to say," Solemn inquired sharply, "that you're calculating to exhibit that infernal thing to the general inhabitants of Red Bluff?"

"Isabel will be exhibited," Dirty Shirt replied tersely.



"It's downright indecent and ridiculous!" Solemn exploded impatiently. "A man your age ought to have too much self-respect and independence to lug a cussed, disgusting thing like that around and—turn himself into a chaperon for a danged, contemptible baby buzzard!"

"A man my age," Dirty Shirt answered, grinning impudently, "has got a right to be a chaperon for any dog-gone thing he wants to turn himself into a chaperon for, and self-respect ain't got a blasted thing to do with it. And as far as that's concerned, it ain't any more unselfrespectful or ridiculous or indecent for me to be a chaperon for Isabel, even if Isabel is a juvenile buzzard, than it would be for a certain old, yaller-whiskered, squinty-eyed scorpion dodger to be a chaperon for a disgusting Gila monster, which it seems to me I heard him announce not so blamed long ago that he was going to get and make bite my Isabel."

Solemn colored deeply at the deliberate taunt.

"Just keep your shirt on your horses!" he shot back, a little upset. "Sooner or later, if that miserable buzzard ain't exterminated first, the said Gila monster will be got and he'll likewise do some biting that will eliminate that despicable and useless buzzard, Isabel, as you call him!"

"Isabel ain't any despicable than a Gila monster is!" Dirty Shirt retorted promptly. "And as regards her being useless, before this dog-gone thing is over with, you're liable to have a blamed good chance to change your mind and decide that Isabel is a cussed more usefuller than she is useless. Under certain circumstances even a buzzard can be useful as hell, or I miss my estimation!"

"Yes, and under certain circumstances a buzzard can be dead as hell!" Solemn growled threateningly. "And when I get me my Gila monster—if I do get me one—and get him trained to bite her, that's what 'll happen to that dog-gone buzzard after he bites her just once."

"Get him!" Dirty Shirt said derisively. "Just get your danged Gila monster you've been raving about! Just get him—and let him try biting Isabel just once and then watch developments!"

"Developments will be watched!" Solemn asserted warmly.

The rest of the journey to Red Bluff's only Chinese café was finished in silence.

Wong Gee registered a polite excitement when Dirty Shirt parked Isabel on a vacant chair and sat down with Solemn at the table.

"Chlicken? Young chlicken? Maybe pletty soon flickasee?" he murmured questioningly, his alert, black, Oriental eyes shrewdly appraising Isabel.

Solemn shuddered uncomfortably at Wong Gee's suggestion of "flickasee," with Isabel as the foundation thereof.

"Don't mention cooking that damned buzzard into 'flickasee,' or any other way in my presence," he commanded Wong Gee, "especially while I'm in a dining room. Bring me some ham and eggs."

"Bring me some, too," Dirty Shirt added, "and turn my eggs over—and fry some liver for Isabel. Also, don't make any more remarks about making 'flickasee' out of her. Isabel's got a better future destination than to be made into 'flickasee,' or for that matter to be fried, or even stewed," he finished, gazing fondly at the young buzzard perched on the chair at his side, her mouth already beseechingly opened.

"Maybe, all samee by and by," Wong Gee murmured eagerly, admiring the unusual size of Isabel's hooked and undoubtedly strong and sharp bill, "him big and him be fighting chlicken and all samee him and my new fighting looster have big blattle! What say?"

"When Isabel gets mature," Dirty Shirt responded laughingly, "we might try it, because when she's educated the way I aim to educate her, she'll probably be competent to 'blattle' any man's 'looster'!"

"But," he hesitated, and his brown eyes twinkled mischievously as he glanced at Solemn, "before she fights anything else, Isabel has already got a contract to lick hell out of a unmentionable Gila monster a certain old, yaller-whiskered buzzard despoiser has dedicated himself to get and train to bite her and kill her—which I doubt like thunder if he does!"

Solemn Johnson reddened, but kept silent.

"Gila monstel him pletty bad on blattle," Wong Gee muttered dubiously. "Maybe better Isabel—you call him—blattle fighting looster before him blattle Gila monstel. Maybe all samee after Gila monstel and Isabel him blattle, Isabel him be too much sickee—too damn muchee dead—to blattle blattling looster!"

"Isabel will be able to defend her own integrity!" Dirty Shirt chuckled confidently, as Wong Gee turned and slithered toward the kitchen.

Solemn scowled, flushed more deeply still, and said nothing.

#### IV

THE desert metropolis of Red Bluff greeted Isabel with admiration and interest. The infant buzzard attracted more attention than a grown-up politician.

Shortly after supper Solemn and Dirty Shirt strolled into Saloon Number Four, and Dirty Shirt dramatically and unexpectedly deposited Isabel on the bar. Colonel Spilkins, Red Bluff's urbane and polished justice of the peace, postmaster, *et cetera*, stepped back and gazed in amazement at the strange, pop-eyed, open-mouthed creature, and exclaimed:

"My Gawd, Dirty Shirt, what is it? Where in Tophet did you get it?"

"She's Isabel," Dirty Shirt answered proudly, "my new adopted buzzard. Solemn and me found her out at Skeleton Butte; her ma and pa had been poisoned by wolf bait or something. It surprised you, didn't it, when you saw Solemn and me appear with a pet buzzard?" he finished exultantly.

"Well, for an instant," Colonel Spilkins replied soberly, "it did! Almost as much," he went on, his eyes twinkling with sly humor, "as it would have surprised me had you and Solemn appeared with a pet Gila monster!"

The crowd laughed, and only Dirty Shirt observed that Solemn had winced painfully at mention of a Gila monster.

Colonel Spilkins's inference was not far-fetched. The penchant of the two venerable and wealthy, although still kindly, simple hearted, whimsical prospectors for adopting odd pets, and particularly creatures they found hungry, or suffering, afforded the two-hundred-and-seven-population of Red Bluff much of its entertainment and excitement.

No one in Red Bluff would have been greatly surprised had Solemn and Dirty Shirt entered any one of Red Bluff's seven saloons leading a boa constrictor, an elephant, a humming bird, an alligator, a jack rabbit, a centipede, a hydrophobia cat, or any other animal or insect, large or small, toward which their fancy or pity might turn.

Hence, the bird named Isabel, Dirty Shirt's childish buzzard, was considered by the inhabitants of Red Bluff as more of an opportunity than as a surprise.

Dirty Shirt shot a swift, triumphant look at Solemn, who now was colored a conspicuous red because Colonel Spilkins mentioned a Gila monster.

"Isabel, being an orphan, and mighty nigh starved," Dirty Shirt explained, "I just thought we'd bring her along and maybe she'd come in handy some time."

"No damned buzzard that ever existed ever come in handy any time!" Solemn declared gruffly. "Buzzards are one variety of animals that wasn't made for the purpose of coming in handy."

"Nobody, and least of all a old, yaller-whiskered objector to practically everything, knows what animals was made for the purpose of coming in handy and what ones wasn't made for coming in handy!" Dirty Shirt retorted with spirit. "There might be cases where even a buzzard would come in handy."

"Buzzards are too disgusting and melancholy to ever come in handy!" Solemn asserted again, pouring himself another drink of Bourbon. "The only chance for that blasted Isabel, or any other buzzard, to come in handy, would be to come in handy to be—to be—" Solemn hesitated.

"To be bit by a Gila monster, I reckon?" Dirty Shirt questioned sneeringly, finishing the sentence.

The glass of Bourbon was at Solemn's lips, and he did not answer; it seemed unnecessary. Dirty Shirt had expressed the thought that was in Solemn's mind.

"What are you going to do with—with Isabel, Dirty Shirt?" Colonel Spilkins asked.

"Going to educate her!" Dirty Shirt replied happily. "I always have wanted to experiment and educate a pet buzzard, and Isabel is the first chance I ever had to get me one."

"Educate her for what?" Chuck Roden, the bartender, queried.

"Educate her for everything!" Dirty Shirt answered. "No telling what that buzzard can be educated to do. She's smart!"

"She's got a hell of a big mouth!" Tom Stanton said, and laughed. "What does she eat?"

"Most anything," Dirty Shirt replied boasting. "She ain't a bit finicky. But

she's fondest of tobacco. I've already got her trained to eat it. Watch her!"

As Dirty Shirt twisted off a chew of tobacco, Isabel showed sudden impatience and eagerness. Her open bill reached greedily for the morsel, while from her throat came low, guttural cluckings.

Dirty Shirt deftly dropped the slug of tobacco into her mouth. Isabel's strong upper and lower mandibles clicked shut; her large eyes gazed affectionately, adoringly, at Dirty Shirt. The muscles of her neck twitched and contracted as if she were trying to chew. A moment later she gulped and her mouth again opened pleadingly, as if asking for more.

"Suffering cats, but she is smart!" Chuck Roden exclaimed. "Did you see her? She acted like she was trying to chew it!"

"She positively as hell did!" Heterogeneous Saunders chipped in admiringly. "She's the smartest danged buzzard I ever saw. If anything, she's as smart a buzzard as my pet, 'Perfect Alibi,' is a polecat. I'll bet anybody could dog-gone near teach that buzzard to talk!"

Solemn sneered silently at Heterogeneous as if he considered that the polecat fancier, in his enthusiasm, had taken in too much territory.

"It's possible," Colonel Spilkins remarked gravely. "The Mexicans down around Yuma catch magpies and crows, tame them, split their tongues, and teach them to speak a few words. It seems reasonable that if a crow or magpie can learn to speak that a buzzard ought to, especially as intelligent a buzzard as—as Isabel seems to be. It would be an interesting experiment. A talking buzzard ought to provide a lot of high-class entertainment."

"It absolutely as hell ought to!" Chuck agreed, and laughed.

"Why don't you try it, Dirty Shirt?" Heterogeneous suggested. "An educated conversational buzzard would sure be fantastical and fascinating."

"I ain't saying what I'm going to educate her to do, or what I ain't going to educate her to do," Dirty Shirt replied, smiling broadly, overjoyed at the instant popularity which Isabel had achieved.

"But if she don't—" He glanced meaningfully at Solemn—"get bit by a Gila monster or something, there's one old yaller-whiskered borax mine owner I could mention, but don't need to, who'll be surprised

as hell at the education that buzzard will have before I get through educating her."

Solemn grunted, ignored the insult, and poured himself another drink of Bourbon.

Later that evening Dirty Shirt acquainted the congregations in Red Bluff's half dozen other saloons with the knowledge that Isabel, his recently secured buzzard, was in their midst. In each place he exhibited to admiring crowds Isabel's tobacco-chewing attainments, her mental alertness, and her generally charming personality.

Solemn was a party to the tour, but consistently, stubbornly, he maintained his attitude of sullen, bored antagonism.

Henceforth Isabel was recognized as a regular, logical and permanent exhibit in the rapid, seven saloon, one Chinese laundry, two-hundred-and-seven-population metropolis of Red Bluff, out in the center of a large and extraordinarily desolate desert.

## V

AUTUMN was approaching. The lazy, sun-filled days of summer had slipped quickly away. In a little while the few dry, dead yuccas on Slaughter House Hill would be dead and dryer still. The passing months had wrought some interesting changes.

The starving, pathetic, clumsy infant, Isabel, which Dirty Shirt Smith had rescued, pityingly, from the foodless, parentless nest on the rock-crowned summit of Skeleton Butte, was a transformed buzzard.

Instead of the scrawny, gawky, awkward creature, helpless and virtually naked, and no longer than a six or eight weeks' old domestic turkey—and looking something like one—Isabel was now a vigorous, magnificent, perfectly proportioned thing of beauty, fully as large, if not larger, than Wong Gee's popular belligerent black Indian game fighting rooster.

The dingy, soiled, sickly-dark feathers which had but scantily covered her frail, unhealthy looking body, were replaced by a coat as glossy and as glistening as a chunk of freshly broken anthracite coal, and of the same shimmering midnight hue.

Her eyes had lost their painfully bulging, popped-out appearance, and, instead, were deep, calm pools of yellowish-brown intelligence.

Isabel had the freedom of Red Bluff, going and coming at will. She was a wel-

come and frequent visitor at each of Red Bluff's seven saloons, although, from the beginning, she had steadfastly refused to drink either beer or Bourbon or any of the other inebriating beverages which were, in those days, legally endured.

Isabel enjoyed the distinction and honor of being Red Bluff's sole total abstainer. Her only obnoxious habit—if obnoxious it is, and which some will dispute—was her passionate craving for chewing tobacco. This was a craving which Dirty Shirt Smith himself had fostered.

Isabel's devotion to Dirty Shirt was touching and persistent, and seldom would she permit him long out of her sight. Often she wheeled for hours in graceful, effortless spirals high above Red Bluff, or circled slowly, thoughtfully, over Slaughter House Hill, which, next to the back yard of Wong Gee's Café, was her favorite rendezvous.

At other times Isabel would drift in great, wide-flung loops far out over the desert and disappear into the measureless blue of space above the parched and barren earth. Yet always she would return to seek out Dirty Shirt Smith—and he would give her a chew of tobacco.

Solemn Johnson still treated Isabel with coldness and scorn, either affected or real. Frequently he repeated his threat that sooner or later he would get himself a Gila monster, teach it how to bite Isabel, have the two engage in a battle, and gloat when his Gila monster killed her.

Dirty Shirt laughed at Solemn's stubborn animosity toward Isabel, and made light of his gruesome and cruel threats against her life, confident that Solemn had no intention of doing a thing so terrible. And even while Solemn grumbled and talked much of getting himself a Gila monster, and having it bite the buzzard, Dirty Shirt had a feeling that Solemn himself had acquired a real and deep, although cleverly concealed admiration, if not indeed an affection for Isabel.

Yet Dirty Shirt continued his deliberate plans for educating more completely his remarkably docile buzzard. Many of Isabel's lessons Dirty Shirt, for his own reasons, preferred to give her in secret, and to this end, often when Solemn, perhaps, was taking an afternoon nap, Dirty Shirt made short excursions with Isabel, spending the hours on Slaughter House Hill, or strolling up picturesque Rattlesnake Cañon or fooling around over on Burro Butte.

If Solemn was aware of Dirty Shirt and Isabel's mysterious wanderings, he made no sign. He preferred to affect an indifference which was calculated to be more humiliating to Dirty Shirt than would be open reproach or argument. Solemn seemed to be developing a proud reticence in the matter of Isabel and his own possible Gila monster.

The time now was one afternoon when the late summer haze was tempering the almost fiendishly hot glare of the desert sun, shrouding with a veil of mystic softness the desolate bulk of Dead Angel Mountain, making dimmer still the faint and dreary loneliness of Skeleton Butte, and flinging an entrancing mist-like sheen over the gloomy although magnificent spires of Tombstone Range.

Perhaps it was the heat, possibly the mood of the weather, possibly merely a whim, but for some reason, just after Solemn and Dirty Shirt stepped out of Saloon Number Three, Solemn suddenly demanded:

"What's the matter with strolling out to Piute Hot Springs and taking a bath?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," Dirty Shirt agreed readily. "Isabel is flying around out over the desert and probably won't get back till we do," he added, "and even if she does, more than likely she'll come on out to the springs and meet us."

Without further delay Solemn and Dirty Shirt, with Versus following, trudged silently away and headed up Rattlesnake Cañon toward the only natural, but interesting, public bathing resort of Red Bluff, a couple of miles to the south and west. During most of the walk nothing was said.

"It's a comfort," Solemn muttered as they approached the bath shack at the springs, "not to have that damned buzzard flopping and fluttering around. I get so danged sick of her following us everywhere we go that if you don't educate her to stay at home more, some day I'll knock her infernal head off."

"Don't worry about how I'm educating Isabel," Dirty Shirt replied quietly, his voice singularly free from resentment. "When it comes to educating a buzzard, and especially as intellectual a buzzard as Isabel is, I don't need any advice from any old yaller-whiskered sand-shuffer who's incapable of appreciating educated buzzards anyhow."



"And if you'll just keep calm for a little while," he went on, speaking a little more earnestly as he proceeded, "you'll get one of the absolute surprises you ever got in your life, because Isabel's education is practically finished, and with a few more lessons on one or two certain private things she'll be the most cultivated buzzard that ever swallowed a chew of tobacco."

"Well, if she keeps tormenting around," Solemn retorted, "I'll get me my damned Gila monster—"

"Seems to me like I've heard a Gila monster mentioned somewhere before!" Dirty Shirt interrupted with a derisive, sarcastic sneer. "And the said Gila monster is as absent as ever! But whenever the danged Gila monster is got and is present and gets in the humor to bite anything, Isabel will be pleased to make his acquaintance—and also will probably do a little biting on her own responsibility!"

Solemn changed the subject.

"You can go on in and take your bath," he said mildly, as Dirty Shirt paused at the door of the bath shack. "I'm going to lie down under this piñon tree and rest awhile before I take mine."

Versus stuck her head under the shade of the tree and stood silently, also resting, a few feet from where Solemn lay down on the dry, wind-swept sand.

It was warm, and Solemn was tired. The splash of the water in the near-by bath shack, and Dirty Shirt's not entirely unmusical tenor-like voice monotonously humming "Silver Threads Among the Gold," as he reveled in the luxury of the warm, sulphur-flavored water, lulled Solemn to sleep, but for how long he did not know. A gentle flopping of wings and a sudden swish awakened him.

## VI

SOLEMN opened his eyes, looked up and beheld Isabel sitting on Versus's back, staring calmly, steadily down at him. Solemn frowned, shut his eyes, squinted them, opened them, and glared disgustedly, contemptuously at Isabel—sitting motionless on Versus's back. Isabel continued to sit and to stare.

Suddenly Isabel opened her mouth, and with the utmost gravity, in a harsh, throaty, gravelike voice, said:

"Ha! Ha! Solemn, go to hell!"

Having said which, Isabel again lapsed into brooding, somber, death-like silence.

For a moment Solemn Johnson was stunned by the unbelievable thing he had heard, and the source from which it had come. He listened, wondering dazedly if Isabel would repeat it.

At first Solemn hoped that she would, then he hoped that she wouldn't, and still again he hoped that she would. But Isabel sat speechless, immovable as an effigy of polished jet, on Versus's back.

Then a red, choking, incoherent fury filled old Solemn. The full significance of the deadly insult had come to him, and the utterly passionless, impartial, impersonal, almost mechanical tone in which Isabel had delivered her short oration only added to the murderous, flame-hot anger which Solemn felt.

A buzzard had told him to "Go to hell!"

It was utterly intolerable. And, as if that were not enough, the bird had prefaced a mirthless, metallic "Ha! Ha!" to the insult.

Never before had a buzzard told Solemn Johnson to "Go to hell!" or anywhere else. Never before had he heard or known of a buzzard telling any one to "Go to hell!" He was the only man in the world, so far as he knew, whom any buzzard had dared to tell to "Go to hell!"

And the buzzard that did it, that contemptible Isabel, had the cold insolence to remain motionless on Versus's back and stare and stare and keep on staring unremorsefully down at the man to whom she had said it.

Solemn exploded in rage.

"Say it again!" he spluttered, sitting up and glaring almost insanely and shaking his fist at Isabel. "I just dare you to say it again. You black, infernal, disgusting, miserable, damned, dead coyote eater!"

"Just say it again!" he repeated. "I—I—challenge you to say it again! No cussed buzzard that ever lived can tell me to 'Go to hell!' or can 'Ha! Ha!' at Solemn Johnson and survive!" he raged on at the silent Isabel. "That 'Go to Hell!' and the 'Ha! Ha!' have sealed your damn fate!"

"I'll get my dog-gone Gila monster now! As definitely as hell, I will. I wasn't goin' to get him, but I'll get him now, and if it's the last thing he does on earth, I'll make him bite your dirty, contemptible, damn buzzard carcass! The next time you tell me to 'Go to hell!' and 'Ha! Ha!' you won't be alive two minutes after."

Solemn stopped suddenly.

Dirty Shirt had finished his bath and, fully dressed, a queer smile on his lips, stood in the door of the bath shack.

"Well, of all things," Dirty Shirt murmured innocently, "if there ain't Isabel! I knowed the blessed thing would come and find us if she got back to Red Bluff before we did.

"But—" There was a hint of subtle raillery in his voice. "I had the impression there was a conversation going on out here a minute ago. I thought I heard somebody talking. I don't reckon there's any chance that a certain old yaller-whiskered borax mine owner has got so danged weak minded he's developing the idea that there's two of himself and he has to get both of himself together once in awhile and talk things over, be there?" Dirty Shirt finished with a laugh which seemed to Solemn to be a deliberate effort to offend him.

"A old yaller-whiskered borax mine owner will talk to who he dog-gone pleases!" Solemn snorted, a little embarrassed, wondering if Dirty Shirt had heard and knew that Solemn knew that Isabel could tell any one to "Go to hell!" and "Ha! Ha!" at them. Solemn hoped that Dirty Shirt had not heard the largely one-sided conversation between Isabel and himself.

The thought had occurred to Solemn that perhaps he could keep Dirty Shirt from knowing that Isabel had told him to "Go to hell!" In the meantime he could find a Gila monster to bite Isabel and kill her. This would keep Dirty Shirt from enjoying the full measure of his triumph in educating the buzzard to speak the disrespectful phrase, which he had spent months of patient and secret effort to achieve.

"I'll talk whenever and to whoever I want to talk," Solemn repeated, "but in the immediate future we'll both do more walking than talking. To-morrow we're going out to Arsenic Springs; there's something out there in that lava jumble on the foot of Skeleton Butte that I want to get."

Dirty Shirt knew that the place Solemn mentioned was infested with Gila monsters.

"Referring to a Gila monster, no doubt, I presume?" he questioned with studied politeness.

"I be," Solemn answered gruffly.

"Things have gone far enough in regard to that cussed buzzard, and it is inevitable that a Gila monster be got as soon as—"

"Get him!" Dirty Shirt interrupted. "Any Gila monster that thinks he can out-bite Isabel in a fight is welcome to his opinion, but he'll be the worst disappointed lizard before it's over with that ever had an ambition to bite a buzzard, and especially a buzzard that's educated like Isabel's educated."

"That's to be demonstrated!" Solemn snapped, rising and turning away.

"Ain't you going to take your bath?" Dirty Shirt asked in astonishment.

"I ain't!" Solemn gritted. "I ain't in the humor for taking baths at present. In addition, there's some preparations to be made this P.M. to get ready to start to Arsenic Springs to-morrow A.M."

Dirty Shirt was giving Isabel a chew of tobacco and did not reply.

Isabel swallowed the tobacco, and Solemn and Dirty Shirt, plus Versus, with Isabel coasting along in the air above them, trudged down rock-strewn Rattlesnake Cañon toward the two-hundred-and-seventy population, one Chinese laundry, seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff.

## VII

SILENTLY, with grim determination, as the sun was cresting the summit of Slaughter House Hill the following morning, Solemn Johnson, assisted by Dirty Shirt Smith, packed the well-worn and familiar articles of camp equipment on the patient back of Versus, their faithful mouse-colored burro.

A little while previously, Dirty Shirt had given Isabel a chew of tobacco. In her own way the educated buzzard had expressed her gratitude, then flown languidly across the open space back of the row of saloons and disappeared in the neighborhood of the rear yard of Wong Gee's Café.

Dirty Shirt handed Solemn the flapjack skillet, looked in the direction Isabel had gone, and said:

"If Isabel don't watch out we'll get started before she gets back. But even if we do get started first," Dirty Shirt went on confidently, "she'll probably find us and overtake us. It would sure be lonesome if she wasn't present at our—"

"Personally, I ain't losing any sleep," Solemn broke in roughly, "over that cussed buzzard being present. My conclusion

is that life would be a whole lot cheerfuller and not half as melancholy if there never was any infernal dead carcass-suggesting buzzard present anywhere again."

"Isabel ain't a dead carcass-suggesting buzzard!" Dirty Shirt flung back. "She's a educated buzzard, and not only that, but—"

"Isabel is a buzzard," Solemn interrupted again; "and a damned buzzard—hand me that coffeepot!—is a damned buzzard to the end of her career, educated or uneducated."

"A buzzard has got just as much right to be a buzzard," Dirty Shirt retorted, "as an old yaller-whiskered sand-squishing prospector, no matter how rich he is, has got to be an old yaller-whiskered sand-squishing prospector, or for that matter as a—a—Gila monster has to be a Gila monster!"

"A Gila monster ain't always flying around watching for something to die—" Solemn began.

"No," Dirty Shirt interrupted, "but the disgusting thing is always squatting by the side of a rock waiting for somebody to come along and set down on the rock so he can bite them and make them die!"

"Anybody that ain't got any more sense than to set down on a rock that a Gila monster is squatting by," Solemn argued feelingly, "ought to be bit! That applies to buzzards as well as anything else," he went on, "and if that idiotic Isabel sets down on a rock that my Gila monster is squatting by, when I get me a Gila monster; and if she does it before I get him trained, and him and her have their fight and he bites her, anyhow, she's entitled to be bit."

"Also," Solemn proceeded, warming up to his subject, "as poisonous as Gila monsters are, one bite—and it won't need to be such a hellish big one, either—is all he'll need to kill Isabel so darned dead she'll never have any more ambition to set down on rocks that Gila monsters are squatting by the side of!"

Dirty Shirt let Solemn finish before he spoke, then, as if he had not heard him, he quietly said:

"Before you tie that pack on you'd better look in the grub box and see if the extra chewing tobacco is in. Isabel needs a lot, and I don't want to run short. Did you put it in?"

"It's in," Solemn grunted; "but I

didn't see the bottle of permanganate to offset rattlesnake bites and things like that. Have you got it in your pocket?"

"There ain't any," Dirty Shirt replied. "I met Mexican Joe over by Burro Butte the other day, and he was going out to Hellfire Basin coyote poisoning, and forgot to take his, so I gave him ours, to save him going back after his. If you think we might need it you'd better get some."

"Nobody ever knows when they might need anything," Solemn answered, "especially antidotes for rattlesnake bites, thick as rattlesnakes are on this darned old desert. Here, you finish hitching this pack on Versus and I'll go across to Colonel Spilkins's drug counter at the post office and get a new bottle. He always keeps some made up in solution," Solemn finished as he handed the tie rope to Dirty Shirt and started toward Red Bluff's general store.

"If you see Isabel tell her to come on back," Dirty Shirt called after Solemn, "so she won't have to hunt for us after we get started."

Without replying, Solemn hurried onward to buy the permanganate. Returning a few minutes later he detoured at Wong Gee's Café to take the short cut between the restaurant and Saloon Number Four, back to the little shack where Dirty Shirt by then had finished lashing the pack on Versus.

Isabel was picking fragments of meat from the waste box by the side of the back door of Wong Gee's Café.

Solemn saw Isabel. He hesitated for only a moment, then walked quickly to where she had her head buried in the waste box, picked her up, carried her to the wire chicken coop in which Wong Gee kept his black Indian game fighting rooster, opened the door, thrust Isabel inside, shut the door, fastened it, and hurried away without a backward glance.

"That ought to teach her to keep her darn fool mouth shut and not tell people to 'Go to hell!' and 'Ha! Ha!' at them!" Solemn muttered to himself as he walked hastily to where Dirty Shirt and Versus were waiting.

"Is Isabel comin'?" Dirty Shirt asked.

"She—she don't seem to be," Solemn stammered innocently. "I got the permanganate, a four ounce bottle of it, in solution," he went on, picking up the heavy "get-up" stick and giving Versus a gentle

prod. "Come on. We'd better be going before it gets any hotter."

"Didn't you see anything of her? Anything at all?" Dirty Shirt continued to question as the trio started away. "It's danged funny she don't show up."

"I had importanter things to see about than to try to see if I could see anything of that contemptible buzzard," Solemn evaded, urging Versus forward.

"Well, I wisht to Gawd she'd come," Dirty Shirt went on plaintively. "It 'll be lonesome as hell without her. And she'll just about fly her darned head off hunting for us!"

"She's probably safe enough," Solemn argued, "and the chances are she won't even notice us being gone." He grinned inwardly as he thought of how perfectly safe Isabel was in the wire coop with Wong Gee's fighting rooster.

"Well, I wisht she'd come," Dirty Shirt repeated, glancing back, a troubled look in his brown eyes.

But there was no sign of Isabel coming, and frequently, during the hot and tiresome hours that followed while Solemn and Dirty Shirt and Versus toiled onward toward Arsenic Springs, Dirty Shirt repeated his plaintive but futile wish.

It was late when Solemn and Dirty Shirt, plus Versus, minus Isabel, arrived at Arsenic Springs. Only a thin splash of fading yellow from the setting sun touched the treeless summit of Dead Angel Mountain. Already Skeleton Butte and the wavelike mounds of the desert were in the shadow.

"It's getting too near night to bother about trying to locate my Gila monster this evening," Solemn observed, glancing appraisingly toward the jumble of black basaltic boulders smeared over the lower slope of Skeleton Butte.

"Isabel ain't come yet!" Dirty Shirt muttered, his troubled eyes searching the dimming sky. "It's queer as hell!" he went on, mechanically beginning to help Solemn remove the camp things from Versus's back. "Something must have happened to her or she'd have overtook us before now. She never has gone this long without a chew of tobacco. It ain't natural!"

"Probably I won't be able to locate me a suitable Gila monster anyhow before tomorrow afternoon," Solemn continued absently. "The biggest and completest Gila

monsters never are visible much until after the middle of the day when it begins to get actually hot. They seem to like it, the hotter it is," he finished, looking speculatively toward the small field of volcanic waste cluttering the side of Skeleton Butte.

"What in Sam Hill do you reckon could have happened to that buzzard?" Dirty Shirt resumed pensively. "It ain't normal for her not to have showed up some time during the day, and here it is blamed near night and she ain't in sight yet. I'll bet she's worried almost to death hunting for me, and is as miserable as hell!"

"The completest ones never do stir around much until it's about as hot as it's going to get to be," Solemn continued to think aloud, "so there won't be much use to investigate till around one or two P.M., because my Gila monster, when I get me one, needs to be the completest dog-gone lizard it's possible to get. Then, when I get him trained to bite that damned Isabel, she'll be one disgusting, dadgummed buzzard that 'll find out just how complete a Gila monster can be when it comes to fighting and biting buzzards."

"The chances is she's miserable as hell!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed again, unhappily.

Solemn looked suddenly at Dirty Shirt, a surprised expression in his eyes.

"Who's miserable as hell?" he demanded.

At Solemn's question Dirty Shirt glanced with a half startled look at his partner.

"Isabel's as miserable as hell!" Dirty Shirt replied. "She ain't come yet. And I'll bet she's miserable as hell wondering where I am at, and craving a chew of tobacco!"

"Most buzzards is always miserable as hell!" Solemn snorted heartlessly, spreading out his blankets for the night.

"The chances is she's miserable as hell!" Dirty Shirt repeated moodily, unrolling his own blankets on the other side of the lone tree and lapsing into silence, as even the last small splash of light on the barren crown of Dead Angel Mountain dissolved into nothingness and the evening shadows deepened.

## VIII

ISABEL was indeed "as miserable as hell."

She was more miserable than Dirty Shirt himself could imagine. Had he known



how miserable Isabel was, and the reason for her misery, Solemn Johnson's fury the afternoon before when Isabel, at Piute Hot Springs, had unexpectedly told him to "Go to hell!" and "Ha! Ha'd!" at him, would have seemed only a mild and gentle ripple of anger as compared with the hurricane-like wrath which Dirty Shirt Smith would have released.

Isabel was miserable because Solemn went away too quick for her to tell him to go to perdition again. She was miserable because she wanted Dirty Shirt Smith—and a chew of tobacco; and because she was shut in a place that wasn't large.

Isabel was accustomed to freedom, plenty of freedom, and she wanted it; she was miserable, also, because Wong Gee's black, super-belligerent Indian game fighting rooster was in the chicken coop with her.

The fighting rooster himself helped to intensify Isabel's feeling of misery for a few moments. A baleful glare from the rooster's eyes was the first intimation Isabel had that her presence was resented; the ruffled feathers, lowered, threatening head, drooping wings, the generally unfriendly attitude added to Isabel's impression that the rooster was hunting trouble.

Isabel decided to tell him: "Ha! Ha! Solemn, go to hell!"

She got to the second "Ha!" at the same time that the rooster got to her. He slapped Isabel roughly on each side of the neck with his spurs and punched her violently in the small of her back with his bill.

Isabel grabbed the rooster by the leg and pitched him across the coop. The rooster was surprised, but courageous, and tried it again, with the same result.

Three times the rooster experimented, and three times Isabel more than justified his expectations. But she was getting tired of merely pitching her ambitious antagonist across the coop.

The next time Wong Gee's persistent chicken encored his own act Isabel grabbed him by the throat and her hooked bill clicked shut. There was a sudden flop as the rooster acquired not only an accurately broken neck, but a perfectly severed jugular vein and windpipe as well.

Isabel gazed reproachfully at the gasping, rapidly dying ex-fighting rooster, and decided that she was too miserable to even trouble to tell him "Ha! Ha!"

All day and all night, and until Ah Fong—Wong Gee's venerable one-eyed uncle and assistant—came pyjama clad, with cleaver in hand, paddling out into the back yard of the café to split some kindling to start the fire, Isabel was miserable. She squatted in the wire chicken coop and was miserable, steadily, silently miserable.

Ah Fong missed the usual morning crow of Wong Gee's fighting rooster. Curious about the unusual silence, he approached the coop, peered in with his one good eye, and inquired:

"What's a mallow? Loostel him no sing—no clow this time. Allee same, what the hell's the mallow?"

Isabel gazed back at Ah Fong and said: "Ha! Ha! Solemn, go to hell!"

Before she could quite finish, Ah Fong went away from there. Waving the cleaver wildly, he appeared in the pantry bedroom where Wong Gee was still sleeping, and shouted excitedly:

"Devil chicken! Devil loostel! Quick! Come look see! Devil chicken—him talkee! Him say: 'Ha! Ha! Solemn—go to—' Devil chicken!"

"What's a mallow? What's a damn mallow?" Wong Gee muttered drowsily, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Come look see, quick! Devil chicken!" Ah Fong repeated, shivering. "Him tellee Ah Fong: 'Ha! Ha! Solemn, go to—' Come see."

Wong Gee went. With his two good eyes and the better light that had come, he easily took in the situation within the coop.

That his black Indian game fighting rooster was dead was evident to Wong Gee; why he was dead was also evident. Isabel's presence explained that, but Isabel's presence Wong Gee couldn't explain.

Only occasionally did Wong Gee or Ah Fong visit the coop in which they kept the fighting rooster, and the day before had not been one of the occasions. And until now neither Wong Gee nor Ah Fong had known that Isabel was there.

How she came to be in the coop, with the door fastened from the outside, was a mystery Wong Gee could not explain. Speaking rapidly in Chinese, which, so that there may be no misunderstanding, is freely and literally translated here, Wong Gee said to Ah Fong:

"Now how the hell do you reckon that damned educated pet buzzard of Dirty

Shirt Smith's got into that chicken coop with my black Indian game fighting rooster that I got to take the place of 'Angel' after 'Angel' self-assassinated himself on the buzz saw down at the lumber mill? The door is shut!"

"I ain't got the least idea," Ah Fong replied.

"Well, she's sure as hell in there," Wong Gee observed, scratching his head in bewilderment.

"She sure as hell is," Ah Fong agreed, scratching his own head, and also puzzled.

"She not only is," Wong Gee went on, "but danged if she ain't killed my fighting rooster as dead as 'Angel' killed himself when he tackled the buzz saw."

"She sure as hell has!" Ah Fong ejaculated. "I wonder how she done it?"

"It don't matter a damn how she done it," Wong Gee retorted. "The important thing is, she done it."

"I reckon that's right," Ah Fong murmured quietly.

"Of course that's right," Wong Gee flung back, a bit impatiently. "When or how or why anything is killed—even a black Indian game fighting rooster—ain't essential; that it is actually absolutely killed is the vital consideration."

"It probably is," Ah Fong conceded thoughtfully.

"But the thing I'd like to know," Wong Gee resumed perplexedly, "is how the hell that buzzard got in that dog-gone coop to start with."

"I would, too," Ah Fong muttered, "but I can't imagine how she could do it with the door fastened."

"Well, there ain't any use to worry about it," Wong Gee declared philosophically. "We'll just have to make the best of it!"

He opened the door of the coop and dragged out the dead Indian game fighting rooster.

"Instead of having boiled beef and horse-radish for supper to-night we'll have chicken flick—flickasee," Wong Gee said, slightly stumbling over the difficult word as he handed the body of the rooster to Ah Fong. "Here, you take him in and hang him up in the meat box so Old Bob, Mother Skillern's brindle tomcat, can't get at him, if he happens to come around before we get a chance to dress him, and I'll split the kindling."

"Allee light. Him makee velly good

flickasee!" Ah Fong replied, unconsciously dropping into the vernacular, as he took the chicken and trotted toward the back door of the café.

Wong Gee left the door of the coop open and turned to split the kindling.

It was Isabel's opportunity. She wanted Dirty Shirt; she desired a chew of tobacco; she wanted to be out of that miserable, fighting rooster-smelling chicken coop. Isabel went.

So it was that hours afterward, still hunting for Dirty Shirt Smith and almost frantic for a chew of tobacco, Isabel mounted higher and higher and even higher into the blue, infinite depths of the sky, and wheeled in wider and ever wider circles far out above the terrible, the desolate, the death-filled desert.

## IX

It was hot. The hour was between 1 and 2 P.M., when it gets to be actually hot in the desert; approximately as hot as it is possible for it to become.

Versus, Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith's faithful burro, stood motionless, with part of her body in the shade of the lone tree at Arsenic Springs. Dirty Shirt squatted at the foot of the tree with his back against its trunk. Frequently, anxiously, until his eyes ached, he peered out into the silent, vacant sky above the sizzling desert.

Occasionally Dirty Shirt turned his head and looked toward the small field of jumbled black boulders that cluttered the lower slope of Skeleton Butte, perhaps an eighth of a mile away. Solemn Johnson sat there silently, patiently, doggedly, on a rock in the full, pitiless glare of the sun.

"I do wisht that old yaller-whiskered idiot would hurry up and find him a Gila monster, if he's going to find one," Dirty Shirt muttered, "so we could start back to Red Bluff and see what's the matter with Isabel. Something must have happened to that buzzard, or else she'd have found us yesterday, or anyhow this morning. She must be darned near perishing for a chew of tobacco!"

Again Dirty Shirt lifted his eyes to stare wistfully out into the burning, empty heavens.

With his own eyes smarting from the sun glare, Solemn stubbornly, grimly, sat on the rock and waited.

"There must be plenty of them here,"

he began to mumble, and stopped suddenly.

An ugly, blunt, reptilian head was thrust from the crevice between two small boulders. An instant later the rusty brown, oddly mottled neck, shoulders and crooked, supple forelegs of a Gila monster with sinuous deliberation were pushed forward.

The beady, unblinking black eyes seemed to search for an instant for its path before the venomous thing went on. A moment more and the whole beautifully repulsive body of the creature, to the end of its thick short tail, came into view.

Solemn watched as the Gila monster glided silently, yet with remarkable swiftness, forward to a rock a few yards from where he was sitting. It stopped there as motionless as if it were dead, and waited—waited—in the shade of the black volcanic boulder.

Solemn shook his head.

"He ain't big enough—or horrible enough!" he muttered. "My Gila monster, when I get me one, has got to be the most ferocious and hellish looking lizard it is possible to get. That's the only kind, probably, that would have any effect on that damned Isabel buzzard of Dirty Shirt Smith's! And he's got to be longer than that one," Solemn mumbled on, squinting appraisingly the reptile in the shadow of the boulder. "He's pretty well built, but he ain't more than twelve or fourteen inches long—and that's too short."

Once more Solemn resumed his watchful waiting.

Ten minutes, twenty, a half hour passed.

"I wisht to thunder a suitable Gila monster would crawl out," Solemn mumbled again, a little discouraged. "It's getting hotter than blue blazes on this darned rock. My good Gawd! What a beauty!" he whispered suddenly, with a gasp, as he glanced down at a dark opening under a gigantic boulder next to the rock on which he was sitting.

From out the black mouth of the small cave beneath the great stone crept a Gila monster, the "completest" lizard Solemn ever had seen, the absolute ultimate of horrible, loathsome, reptilian hideousness.

Solemn shuddered.

The thing hesitated only an instant, then slithered noiselessly forward and stopped, as motionless, as silent as the shadow of death, in the shade of the very rock on which Solemn sat.

For a few moments, fascinated, almost breathless, Solemn gazed down at the terrible creature and waited. The Gila monster, as if dead—save for the spots of glistering jet which were its cruel eyes—waited also. Solemn knew the hellish purpose for which it waited.

"That stubborn old yaller-whiskered fool surely will catch him a Gila monster pretty soon," Dirty Shirt grumbled plaintively, glancing toward the jumble of basalt boulders on the side of Skeleton Butte.

"If he don't catch him one pretty soon," Dirty Shirt began again, and stopped suddenly as he saw Solemn straighten up. "Maybe he's going to catch him one now. I hope to Gawd he does!" he finished fervently, turning his eyes again to gaze out into the brassy sky, hoping for a glimpse of a buzzard, which would be Isabel, winging through the air.

But Dirty Shirt saw no sign of Isabel. Nor did he see the tragic and terrible thing that happened, during the next few moments, among the black, forbidding boulders on the slope of Skeleton Butte.

He did not see Solemn move carefully, as lightly as he could tread, around the rock on which he had been sitting, nor did Dirty Shirt see the "get-up" stick, in Solemn's hand, pressed quickly, firmly, down on the back of the Gila monster, pinning it writhing and twisting to the earth, while Solemn knelt and tried hurriedly to slip the noose he held in the other hand over the deadly reptile's head and forelegs.

Nor did Dirty Shirt see the sudden violent contortion of the horrible creature's serpent-like body as it slipped from under the "get-up" stick; the vicious snap as its death-filled jaws closed on the flesh of Solemn's arm, and it hung, with furious, bulldog tenacity, while its body swelled with rage and the putrid saliva and poisonous fumes of its breath poured into the wound its teeth had made.

With his eyes gazing into the unfathomable sky, Dirty Shirt did not see, nor did he hear, Solemn's desperate struggle as he fought to tear the fangs of the Gila monster out of his arm; nor did he see Solemn beating with his clenched fist on the leathery, scaly body of the thing; and at last crush its head between the rock on which he had been sitting and a smaller boulder to which Providence, in the terrible battle, had guided his hand.

Not till Solemn had staggered almost to the lone tree beneath which Dirty Shirt squatted, did Dirty Shirt take his eyes from their fruitless vigil in the empty sky within his vision.

"Thank Providence, the old imbecile is coming; he must have got him a Gila monster at last!" Dirty Shirt muttered, and as Solemn came nearer he called out: "Did you get you your dad-blasted Gila monster that you're going to try to educate to have a fight with Isabel and bite her and kill her?"

"I thought I saw a speck in the sky a minute ago," he went on, not waiting for Solemn to answer, "and if I did, it's either Isabel or some other— My Gawd, what the hell's the matter?" Dirty Shirt broke off in alarm as he saw the look of agony on Solemn's face.

"He bit me!" Solemn answered, pushing the sleeve of his shirt up from the wound. "Get that other piece of rope and tie it around my arm—above where his teeth went in."

"Bit you! What bit you?" Dirty Shirt demanded, hurrying for the rope.

"Gila monster—a big one. I killed him!" Solemn replied.

Dirty Shirt's cheeks blanched. He knew too well the awful deadliness of the Gila monster.

"He bit me," Solemn repeated. "Get the bottle of permanganate. It's in my coat pocket over there by the cooking pans. It cures rattlesnake bites; maybe it will antidote Gila monster poison, too."

With trembling hands Dirty Shirt fumbled at Solemn's coat.

"Which pocket is it in?" he asked nervously.

"Blamed if I remember," Solemn replied. "The inside one, I think; but feel around and you'll find it."

## X

DIRTY SHIRT slipped one hand into the inside breast pocket. The coat sagged down, and from the lower outside pocket the bottle of permanganate slid out, dropped against a rock and shattered. The priceless solution, on which Solemn Johnson's life depended, poured out and was soaked instantly into the hot sandy earth.

Dirty Shirt was stunned speechless by the accident. For a moment he gazed in frozen horror at Solemn, and Solemn, realizing also what the loss of the permanga-

nate meant, looked silently back at Dirty Shirt.

"I—I—dropped it—and—broke it—" Dirty Shirt began stammeringly, self-reproachfully, his face twitching.

"Never mind," Solemn replied quietly. "Don't worry about it. It couldn't be helped. Anyhow," he went on, seeking to lessen Dirty Shirt's anguish at the calamity; "it probably wouldn't have done much good."

"What will—what can—we—do?" Dirty Shirt muttered despairingly.

"Nothing!" Solemn answered, still the least excited of the two, although he was beginning to feel that the poison from the Gila monster's bite was taking effect. "He didn't bite me—very deep," he lied gallantly. "The chances are it won't amount to much. Maybe it 'll just make me—uncomfortable for a little while."

But Dirty Shirt knew what the bite of that Gila monster would do unless a quick and heroic treatment was applied. He knew also that the only certain remedy—more sure even than permanganate—the remedy he had seen the Mexicans and Indians of the desert apply to the wound made by the fangs of the Gila monster, was not available.

Dirty Shirt knew, too, that Solemn's carelessly uttered words were spoken to make him feel less badly about the loss of the saving solution of permanganate.

"We've got to do something!" Dirty Shirt muttered anxiously. "Do you reckon we could make it to Red Bluff?" he asked.

"We might try it—after I—rest a little while," Solemn answered, his voice already beginning to thicken a trifle. "Tighten that—rope around—my arm a little tighter—so the poison can't—spread—so—fast!"

"My Gawd, Solemn!" Dirty Shirt mumbled brokenly, kneeling and tightening the bandage. "We've just got to do something!"

"Don't—worry," Solemn replied. "I'll—probably be—all right—pretty—soon. And we'll try to—start for—Red Bluff!"

There was a few moments of silence.

Dirty Shirt still knelt at Solemn's side, his lips compressed, his brain racked with the effort to think of something, anything, which might be done to save Solemn's life.

"I'll probably be all right!" Solemn repeated, speaking not so slowly. "But if anything does happen, I just want to mention first that if I had got me a Gila mon-



ster I was figuring to take his poison fangs out before him and Isabel had their fight. Then, if he had happened to bite her it wouldn't have amounted to anything.

"I just schemed it out for a joke to torment you with, and if it had worked," he finished with a smile, "it would have been a hell of a good one on you and Isabel!"

Dirty Shirt had forgotten Isabel. Not since Solemn had staggered back to the lone tree, after being bitten by the Gila monster, had Dirty Shirt looked once into the sky.

Not even when Solemn mentioned Isabel did Dirty Shirt raise his eyes; instead, he looked back into Solemn's own gray eyes that were twinkling in spite of the agony he felt, as he thought of the "joke" that failed. Although Dirty Shirt's own vision was clouded with the tears that stood in his eyes, he, too, smiled. Then he reverted for the moment to his and Solemn's profanely affectionate habit of argument.

"Why, you danged old yaller-whiskered, sand-squushing hypocrite!" he exclaimed, his voice trembling a little. "I knowed all the time that you was opposing Isabel just for the sake of argument and contrariness, and that you never did intend to have any damned Gila monster actually bite her and kill her! I knowed that inside of you you was just as affectionate—and maybe even more than I was myself—toward Isabel."

Dirty Shirt was interrupted by a black shadow that swept quickly across the yellow, sun-baked grounds. The next instant, Isabel, like a miniature ebony airplane, zoomed down at Dirty Shirt's side.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Dirty Shirt cried joyfully. "The blessed danged thing finally found us at last!"

Isabel spread her broad wings and eased them gracefully again against her back. Then she turned her intelligent, yellowish-brown eyes adoringly up at Dirty Shirt. His hand was already in his pocket.

"The first dog-gone thing I do I'm going to give her a chew of tobacco!" he exclaimed, twisting off a piece of his plug and tossing it into Isabel's mouth, which had opened instantly when she saw her treat appear.

"Gosh, I'm glad Isabel found us," Dirty Shirt went on, stroking her glossy back. "It was lonesome as hell without her. But that just shows how educated even a buzzard can be."

"I'm glad she showed up, too, and that nothing serious happened to her," Solemn said, for a moment forgetting the bite of the Gila monster in his intense wonder as to how Isabel managed to get out of the wire chicken coop in the back yard of Wong Gee's Café, and as to what happened between Isabel and Wong Gee's fighting rooster before she did get out.

Solemn's words brought Dirty Shirt back to the realization that his partner was dying from the venomous bite of the Gila monster. Once more Dirty Shirt racked his brain for some thought that might be the means of saving Solemn's life. Dirty Shirt's hand, meanwhile, slowly stroked the silky, raven-black feathers on Isabel's back.

## XI

SUDDENLY there flashed to Dirty Shirt's mind again the Mexican Indian remedy, the only sure salvation from the bite of the dreaded Gila monster. It required the freshly slashed body of a still living chicken applied to the wound on the stricken human.

Startled by the thought, Dirty Shirt glanced down at Isabel, then turned his eyes and gazed at Solemn.

Solemn Johnson instantly got the thought in Dirty Shirt's mind. He eased his poisoned arm into another position, and gamely shook his head.

"The razor's in the grub box, ain't it?" Dirty Shirt asked, rising and—without waiting for Solemn to speak—going for the sharp-bladed weapon.

"No, no! Not that!" Solemn shook his head again as Dirty Shirt returned with the razor.

"It's the only chance!" Dirty Shirt retorted, his voice shaking a little as he knelt, took Isabel in his arms and paused for an instant to caress her.

"No! No!" Solemn repeated. "Not that, Dirty Shirt! It—it wouldn't be fair to Isabel. I'd rather take a chance of—getting all right."

"It ain't a question of fairness or unfairness," Dirty Shirt declared, speaking with sudden firmness. "It's a question of—of values. And it's got to be done."

Dirty Shirt lifted Isabel's wing, and parted the feathers so that the keen edge of the razor might more surely find the flesh of her breast.

"No! No!" Solemn still protested. "I'll be all right!"

There was a quick, sure movement of Dirty Shirt's hand. Isabel flinched just a trifle and looked with surprise and wonder up into Dirty Shirt's eyes.

The next moment the torn flesh of Solemn's arm, where the venomous teeth of the lizard had been buried, was pressed against the raw, fresh slash on Isabel's breast, and Dirty Shirt held the two new-made wounds tightly together.

Swiftly, surely, the rapid heart beats of Isabel pumped the deadly venom from Solemn's arm into her own unresisting body. There is an affinity between bird and reptile life, as all scientists—and Mexican Indians—know.

While more and more of the fatal poison slipped from Solemn's veins into Isabel's, she stared questioningly down at Solemn.

Occasionally Dirty Shirt felt a shiver run through the form of the buzzard which he held tenderly, yet firmly, so that the contact between the cut on Isabel's breast and the gash-like punctures made by the teeth of the Gila monster on Solemn's arm might not be broken. The crude but sure transfusion, which meant life to Solemn and death to Isabel, were uninterrupted.

From Solemn's closed eyes, unashamed

and unheeded, tears ran down, nor did Dirty Shirt seek to hide the drops that fell from his own cheeks and dampened the midnight plumage of the doomed buzzard.

Until the last trace of the deadly virus was drawn from Solemn's arm there was silence. Isabel's dimming eyes still gazed questioningly at Solemn's tear-wet face.

Without opening his eyes, Solemn muttered, his voice broken with pity and regret:

"Give Isabel another chew of tobacco!"

There was a fleeting gleam of light in the eyes of the dying bird. Solemn's pitying words had pierced the void into which she was slipping. Suddenly, in a level, unemotional, almost inaudible voice, Isabel said:

"Ha! Ha! Solemn, go to hell!"

Solemn Johnson opened his eyes. Once more, and for the last time, a buzzard had told him to go to perdition. Solemn did not swear this time; instead, he smiled, even through the sorrow that was in his heart because Isabel would never speak again.

Dirty Shirt Smith felt a trembling shudder, a stiffening of Isabel's body. Her head dropped limply forward onto his arm.

Isabel's education was finished.

THE END

## Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1st, 1927. Required by the Act of Congress of August 24th, 1912.

State of NEW YORK } s.s.:  
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared C. T. DIXON, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in Section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

**That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor and Business Manager are:**

Publishers—THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—R. H. TITHERINGTON, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—C. T. DIXON, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**That the Owners are:** (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

ESTATE OF FRANK A. MUNSEY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:**

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

That the two paragraphs, next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owners; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

C. T. DIXON, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1927.

A. V. KASS, Notary Public.  
New York County, No. 284.  
New York Register No. 8197.  
Term expires March 30th, 1928.



